

Scarlet Memories

by RavenRois

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Summary: Hijikata and Chizuru meets in a different way. She was an innocent girl who became the woman of the night. Scarred and her spirits crumbling down, she'd be found by a man whose red strings of fate would intertwine with hers in one fateful night. Would he be able to make her feel once more? How would he turn her wheel of fate?

1. Lost and Hollow

****Lost and Hollow****

_Life doesn't always work out the way you imagined it to be. I was once an innocent, naïve girl who's got an image of what her life would be in the future playing in her head. Yes, a girl whose little joys in life includes having a new outfit for the spring festival and eating dango while enjoying some tea in the garden. That girl who believed that there is a good in everything no matter how evil it may appear to be, where is she now? _

For a long while that girl got tossed into a world that she knows not of, a world known to many as reality. To others who weren't as sheltered as that girl, the world with its sin and filth is part of the natural order of things but to her it was like a long procession in a dungeon full of agony leisurely leading her to her demise. Played around the ravenous claws of men who are willing to spare some gold coins just to quench their insatiable lust, her once pleasant dreams were stripped away from her along with her dignity, in exchange for nightmares and dishonor. How I loathe that girl for allowing herself to be used and abused. If there is one thing that girl is thankful for at her time of despair though, it was the extra strength that the gods granted her to not take her own life after deciding that she's had enough.

_I can still clearly remember everything like it happened yesterday. It was a place of light and beauty. The lights hide the shadows in

the hearts of the ladies who are displayed behind wooden bars like dolls and those who peeked and posed on the balconies attracting the next catch for the night. The lights also guide those who wander into the district to the small haven where a nice sake and warm bosom awaits to comfort and to please. In that place beauty is both a gift and a curse, beauty can either save you or break you. Truth be said, I'm not sure if I can call it beauty if it was an effect of flashy decorations, colorful clothes and make-up but these are the necessary ingredients to make the illusion that everything is just fine. _

A series of unfortunate events lead me to that place. For a while I remember being kept as some sort of an apprentice. I ran errands here and there, helping out whenever I can. At that point I told myself that I would do just fine if I continue what I was doing and even thought that a good job at washing the clothes and cleaning the baths would save me from the fate of those lovely looking dolls but I was wrong. Before I knew it my innocence was up for a bid.

They bathed me and clad me in robes of silk and glimmering accessories. I can still remember the cold brush as it touched my lips for the first time to tint it red. The white powder and the colors placed in my eyes felt uncomfortable but I remembered being told that from then on those were my weapons. A mirror was placed in front of me, for a long while I stared at it, unable believe that it was really me on the reflection. I remembered shivering a bit in fear not knowing what would become of me but I smiled at the reflection of myself nonetheless, admiring myself one last time.

_I was lead to a huge room occupying the top floor of the brothel. 'Remember the things I told you. Just be a good girl and make sure that the master is pleased. He paid a good price for you' Those were the last things whispered to me by the manager of the brothel before the door was slid open and I was led in then left behind. I knelt with my head down not knowing what to do or what to say. I was then asked to lift my head and come closer. I didn't expect to see a noble looking young man. He smiled at me and asked me to pour him some wine. I obediently did as he said despite the fear I felt in my heart. For a while I was just pouring wine for him but soon enough his true nature was revealed. He started touching me in inappropriate places and his gentle smile turned into a licentious grin. I was told not to refuse or resist but I remembered desperately pulling away, scratching and pushing the man as he yanked my robes away from my body, exposing my flesh to his hungry eyes. The fight I put up was not enough, after being slaved away as a cleaning lady and fed insufficiently, the last morsels of strength left in my body slipped away. He seemed to enjoy the fact that I put up a fight and he caught me like a cat pouncing on a mouse cornered in an alley. _

_I can't scream or cry but I can still remember the fear that paralyzed my body as he started caressing me and tasting me lewdly. For one last time I tried my luck and pleaded that he stop but he replied with a maniacal laugh and removed his clothes in haste. He rubbed his body against mine and knowing what would happen next I started screaming. He slapped me hard, almost knocking my lights. No one has ever done that to me. Tears uncontrollably fell from my eyes as he shoved a repugnant smelling piece of cloth into my mouth. That harmless looking man turned into a monster. A monster who disregarded my inexperience and took me without even the slightest hint of gentleness. Pushing and shoving himself deep into me, thinking only of his own pleasure. All I can do was watch as my body got slowly

defiled. I closed my eyes through the disgust and pain but it didn't help. The moment he was finished with me my tears have already gone dry and a deep scar was embedded in my soul. _

He left me like an unwanted toy in the middle of the room, bleeding and broken. I didn't move a muscle for I don't know how long. Pain and fear mixed in me like poison coursing and pulsing through my veins but instead of making me numb it made me more aware of everything. My mind then went blank. I really just wanted to die. Finally a couple of women who were in the business way longer than me came and picked me up. They both shed a tear for me and helped me up. They bathed me and threw me in fresh robes. They gave me words of encouragement and told me to rest but I couldn't rest and I knew that I could never feel better.

_The manager was pleased with me because the man asked and paid for me to be reserved only for him. I never wanted that nightmare to be repeated but those who were there longer than me told me that I was lucky for I wouldn't have to be passed on from one man to the other while I was reserved for him. The man came twice a week for two months. Until finally one night he got killed, his head chopped off, by a group of men who were feared by almost everyone in the city.

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_I was thankful for that man's death that I gathered some information about those who killed him. I wanted to see the men who unknowingly avenged me. I learnt that every day in both morning and afternoon they patrol the streets of Kyoto. I can never leave the red light district, because if I do I'd be hunted down like a dog but I found a way to see them even from afar. Since our brothel was quite grand and tall, for a couple of days I climbed the roof waiting to see the group of men marching in their light blue robes. Finally I saw them. When I did, I whispered thanks to the wind, hoping that it would reach them. I was aware that they don't have the best reputation and some of their men are lecherous gluttons too who would visit the district when they can but still they eliminated that monster for me.

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_It was just a while till I was up for display like the others. Things got worse for me as I became just another doll for sale. The rising of the sun became my favorite thing because it signifies that the long and almost endless night is over. Every day I would spend time cleaning myself hoping to erase any saliva, scent or mark left in my body by those hounds but no matter how much I wash, scrub and rinse, I know that the filth would never wear off. Shoving that bitter medicine given to us to avoid conception down my throat became a morning routine. I was utterly disgusted with myself. I did my best with putting on my make-up so that I never have to see the face who belongs to the girl I used to know. _

_Just six months in the market and I learnt to accept the name given to me by the manager, Sakura. It was a name I used to guise the name that is now tainted. Slowly I learnt how to become numb. Slowly losing hope with myself and everything, I never thought I could still be saved. Until one night, the gods sent an answer to my prayers. That night a man's string of fate tangled with mine and my destiny took a huge turn. _

2. Fated Attraction

****Fated Attraction****

"Have you heard?" one of the ladies in the dressing room turned to the others who were busy putting on their make-up.

"What?" came the reply from the other ladies.

"I heard that the higher ups of the Shinsengumi are coming here to celebrate. A birthday I guess. A room was already reserved for their celebration."

"I wonder what they're like"

"I heard there are some nice looking men from that bunch" said a lady with a hearty laugh.

"But in the end they'd still turn out like any other men"

"Warrior to be exact." corrected the other as she stood up and wore her robes. "They'd bore you with stories of how they fought this guy and that guy when they're drunk. Talk about honor but would even forget to pull their pants up before leaving the room." a unison of laughter erupted.

"But a friend of mine from the Red House told me that she's spent a night with one of their captains and it was the best she'd ever had, plus the guy was handsome too" said another lady.

"Well keep on hoping that the same one would spot you tonight, so that you can break your streak of having to entertain old geezers." Another loud laughter came from the women.

"If only we have the luck of this girl here" said the other as she pointed at Chizuru with her thumb.

Chizuru who was listening quietly just looked at her with a small smile in her face. "What are you saying? I don't think I'm lucky at all" she explained with a small laugh. "How can I be lucky if I puke at myself almost every day?"_ she thought.

"I mean most of the guys who pick you are younger ones. The ones who want to lose their virginity or the ones who are cheating on their wives who already turned ugly after giving birth. I can think of only few instances in where disgusting ones actually chose you" the lady said.

"Well she is young and her pretty little face is something" Another lady pointed out. "Besides she's the youngest one in our bunch and so far still the newest. Soon her luck would fade away. Old geezers and deviants would come to plug all her holes up" the lady added quite cruelly, obviously jealous of the younger one, as she left the room rolling her eyes.

"Don't mind her. She's just bitching because that daimyo she was dating left her for some lady from a respected family" said Akane, a friend of Chizuru's, who sat next to her. Chizuru just dismissed what she was told and told herself that if things get worse then she'd kill herself already.

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"I said I wanted to spend my birthday alone in my room. No need to go here really" Hijikata sighed as he massaged the bridge of his nose. Another drink was handed to him, which he drank on an instant.

"Come on loosen up" Shinpachi nudged him as he took a swig from his drink.

"He's right. Besides writing more \_haikus \_on your birthday wouldn't do you any good" Okita teased as he passed a drink to Saitou who was telling Heisuke to slow down eating.

"I won't be writing \_haikus\_" he defended.

"What will you be doing then?" Okita inquired.

"I don't know" came the reply.

"Anyway, we have a little gift for you" Sano beamed.

"What is it? You shouldn't have bothered yourself with that. I'm fine evenâ€|" Hijikata started but was interrupted.

"No it's just fine really. And you can't refuse this gift alright. You know it's impolite to do so" Sano said as he placed an arm around Hijikata who seemed to be quite affected by the alcohol already.

"What's this gift anyway?"

"About thatâ€| we'd go get it prepared now. So wait here and enjoy yourself. We'd be back soon" Sano stood up, grabbed Shinpachi and exited the room with dirty smiles on their faces.

The two walked down the hall then the stairs to look for the manager of the place. They spotted her instantly as the woman turned to them with a huge smile on her face.

"Yes, what can I do for you two?" she beamed at them as she checked them out.

"Well, our friend needs company tonight. I was wondering if you can show us to the ladies so that we can pick one that would suit his taste" Sano explained.

"Oh is that so. It's gonna cost youâ€|" the lady started but stopped when Shinpachi handed her some money. The lady almost jumped in joy upon receiving it and quickly guided the two to where the women were. "So your friend, what does he like? I believe I have every girl that could suit anyone's taste." The lady inquired, leaning closer to Sano who just smiled at her advances.

"Do you have anyoneâ€|. hmmm just give us that girl over there" Sano pointed at the girl sitting in the corner. He can only see half her face because she is facing another girl but she looks pretty sweet and adorable. By just looking at her he can say that she is the freshest girl in the place. She is surprisingly well mannered too, not laughing and talking as loudly as the others. She just sat in the corner like a doll, beautiful but not wanting to get any

attention.

'Wow, she's pretty cute" Shinpachi admired the lady from afar.

"Sakura is really a doll. You've chose well. I'll go pick her up. You will be informed when the room's ready; it would take just a while." The lady smiled and bowed at the two.

"Ma'am can you also send up a couple of girls who can pour us our drinks" Sano tossed a couple gold coins to the lady who gladly accepted the request.

"We sure can indulge with these kind of thing every once in a while" Shinpachi said as they headed back to their room. "Hey that girl you chose looks like a fine catch"

"Yeah but she's not really my type. I'd feel guilty to touch such an adorable girl like her." Sano said with a laugh.

"I guess I agree with you. But hey did you saw that lady with the nice set of hooters?" Shinpachi inquired.

"The one with the golden dragon on her robe? Yeah. I hope she's not busy and she's the one the old woman sends us." Sano replied.

Upon returning to their room they sat down beside Hijikata. Shinpachi placed an arm around him and smiled. "The gift is being prepared."

"I think I know what the gift isâ€| but seriouslyâ€|"

"Hey it's alright. You have to enjoy the joys of being a young man. Besides when was the last time that you've been with a woman?" Sano inquired teasingly.

"Tsk. Just shut it. Alrightâ€| alrightâ€| no more complains" Hijikata replied. \_"The last time was in Osakaâ€|"\_ he took another drink. His face was starting to turn red because the alcohol was starting to take effect on him.

Moments later the door slid open and two women introduced themselves as the men's companion for the night. Sano was also informed that the room was already prepared and so he patted his friends back to get him to get going already.

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Chizuru wondered what kind of man she has to serve that night. The manager sure had a huge smile on her face when she came to pick her up. She was told that the man was Shinsengumi's vice commander and she'll be a gift for him.

She knelt outside the door and sighed one last time before announcing her arrival and slowly slid open the door. "Master, I'm Sakura, I would be your companion for tonight. Please feel free to ask anything of me and I hope that you'd be pleased with my services." She said with her head down after closing the door behind her. Like always, in the split second before she would lift her head to see her client for the first time, her heart would start to pound in fear.

Not a word or sound came from the man who sat across her. Finally upon lifting her head a warm feeling started to spread in her chest. _"He'sâ€|beautifulâ€|"_she thought to herself as she laid eye on the man sitting in front of her. _"So whatâ€| he's the same as the othersâ€|I wonder what kind of monster this one is" _she thought as she smiled and placed the _sake_ she brought with her in front of them.

Hijikata was left speechless with the beauty that was in front of him. He hated to admit it but her innocent face, sweet smile and gentle voice mesmerized him.

"Please, If you don't mind I'd prefer to drink tea" he said, stopping the woman from pouring him wine.

"Master, that is an unusual request but I shall bring you one right away" she placed the drinks aside and ducked her head. "Please excuse me."

He watched her as she went and get what he requested. Moments later she returned with the tea he requested.

"Here you go Master" she handed it to him with a smile. The moment he received the tea from her, their skin brushed against each other. For the first time in a long time she felt herself blush.

"Thank you" he said and then he took a sip from his cup.

_"__He sure is politeâ€|this is an unusual startâ€|"_ Chizuru thought as she moved closer to him. He then placed his cup aside and looked at her. She shivered as their gazes met. _"What's this feeling?...He looks even better up close." _

"I'm glad that the tea was in your liking. Is there anything else I can do for you?" she inquired. Usually at this point men would start touching her or taking her already but this one just looked at her. A certain aura emitted by him stopped her from even daring to place a hand on him. _"You've done this many timesâ€| just go on with it and get this overâ€|" _her thoughts were interrupted when he spoke.

"I can see why they picked you." He muttered. "Well, is there something wrong? You've been looking at me like that for a while now"

Chizuru ducked her head. "I'm sorry. Please allow me to make up for my impudence." She said as she moved closer to him.

"You don't look like someone who enjoys doing this. I can see it in your eyes. If you can make a run out of here right now you would. You just want to get this over with, don't you?" he said as he finished the contents of his cup.

"I'm sorry master. That's not it. It's my pleasure to serve you." She reached for his arm and was about to move in to throw herself to him when he stopped her.

"It's alright. I never think I can enjoy doing anything with you if you look at me like that. You can just stay and keep me company." He gave her a small smile. She moved away from him but focused her

attention still on the unusual man in front of her.

Chizuru didn't know what to say. _"This manâ€¦ others would enjoy the hint of fear in our eyesâ€¦ So what now? Does he plan to just converse with me?"_ There was silence for a while. She poured him another cup of tea and this time he asked her to join him. _"What's he up to?"_ she thought as she tried to decipher the almost emotionless face of the man.

"You're from a fine family are you not?" he inquired.

She just looked at him and smiled. A roaring feeling of sadness started to flow from her heart as she was reminded of her happy times back in Edo. "You think so master?" she replied.

"You've got a different air than the other girls, which makes me wonder how you ended up here."

A sincere warm smile escaped her lips. "_I can't believe that a man who paid to spend a night with a woman would be so interested with her past. It's not supposed to be that way. We're supposed to be strangers butâ€¦_" _that feeling of warmth she felt in her chest started growing, slowly melting the ice that walled her heart. Something about him made her feel at ease and before she knew it she started telling her about how she ended up in the brothel. Not only that but for a while they talked about literature when he learnt that she read one of his favorite piece.

He watched her as she smiled at him while they talked. It was different from the smile she had when she first entered the room. He was now aware that his attraction to her started to grow beyond his control.

"Your father, do you think you can still find him?" he inquired.

"I don't think so. My best bet is that he's dead" she replied with a pained smile.

"I'm sorry" he muttered. He then noticed the _samisen _on the corner of the room. "Can you play that instrument?" he asked.

She smiled. "I'm sorry but I don't know how to play any instruments"

"That's alright"

"But I can sing for you if you likeâ€¦" she said feeling unsure if her voice would please him.

"Will you sing for me then?"

She nodded , took a deep breath and closed her eyes for a moment to remember the words of the song she used to sing.

_ "â€¦.afururu namida nuguï hoshi ni negai kakeru. Kono te wo toride ni anata mamoritai to. Inochi no ito akaki enishi kono mi ga hateru to no kirenu ito wo kizuna to yobu sou tokoyo niâ€¦." _

Upon finishing the song she looked up at him. _"Did he fall asleep?"_

He slowly opened his eyes and there gazes met. He smiled. "That was wonderful" he muttered, inside his head her voice stuck.

"Thank you" she felt really flattered.

He stood up and straightened his clothes. "Thank you for your company. I better get going now" he said despite wanting to spend more time with her. He can have her till morning but he has no plans of doing anything to her.

"Wait." Chizuru ducked her head. "Thank you very much for listening to me but I don't think I've done my best to"

"No it's alright. I wouldn't want to be another nightmare to you. I could at least spare you from another night of having to give yourself to someone. I want you to just remember me this way" he said as he knelt down to lift her face up.

She saw the gentleness in his eyes which made her officially fall for him that instant. "I want you to remember me too" she said as she moved her face to his and kissed him. A sincere kiss is not something that a woman like her and a customer should share but at this point that was not how they were.

"You're making me change my mind about going" he said with a smirk as their lips parted.

Chizuru can feel her cheeks burn as she blush. "Well, you don't have to go really" she stuttered. "I mean if you don't want to do it with me that don't mean you can't stay.." she focused her eyes on the floor.

A small laugh escaped his lips. "I can't believe this." He said as he sat back down. "I'll spend the night here then"

"I also can't believe this either." She said with a smile. "I mean it's not every day that I encounter a man like you"

"Can you sing for me once more?" he requested.

"Sure" she replied and then after thinking of what to sing next she sang her heart out to him. Just as the song was about to end she noticed that he seem to be asleep so she gently placed his head on her shoulder. He woke up as she did that and moved his head from her shoulder to her lap and closed his eyes.

"Let me stay like this for a while" he muttered. She looked down at him and started caressing his soft raven hair then she started singing once more.

At dawn when she woke up, she was already on the futon neatly tucked in. She sat up and looked around but the man she was with was nowhere to be found. For a moment she wondered if maybe he was just a dream but she can still feel his lips against her, a proof that he was real.

* * *

><p>Note:_This fic is inspired by Memoirs of a Geisha

and episode 11 of Samurai Champloo. I just wrote this one in a whim actually. Really hope you like it. Please do leave a review, they would be well appreciated by yours truly :))_

3. Till Dawn

****Till dawn****

Back in the headquarters everyone can't help but notice how good the demon vice commander's mood was. It was almost two days since his meeting with her but he can't get her off his mind. Her song even hunts him in his dreams.

"__I'll need to meet her againâ€¦" he thought.

"I wonder what you're writing this time with that smile on your face." Okita leaned on Hijikata's bedroom door watching the guy as he finish what he was writing.

"Just something I'd rather keep to myself. Anyway, Souji did you see Kondo on your way here" he inquired.

"Actually the reason I came here is not to pester you about your _haikus_ but to tell you that the place is set for the meeting with those two faced jerks. Well Kondo-san wants to talk to you first. He's in the main room" Okita said and then quickly left.

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From the moment he walked into the brothel he unconsciously started to look for her but he can't find her anywhere.

"\_\_I wonder where she isâ€¦maybe she'sâ€¦with someone" he thought as they were lead to the room reserved for their meeting with their allies. He felt really awful to think that she might be in another man's arms at the moment.

"Toshiâ€¦" Kondo called his attention. "Is something wrong? You don't seem to be at ease"

"Ahâ€¦I'm alright. I'm sorry." He focused on the men sitting across them who seem to go there not for the meeting but for the booze and women. He was glad that none of the women serving them was her. "Excuse me. Everyone, about our plans toâ€¦" he started his speech.

Minutes later while they were in the middle of their discussion, they were interrupted by rowdy voices from demanding costumers in a room nearby. At first they ignored it, but the moment Hijikata heard that familiar voice which is now on the verge of crying, he stood up. It was obvious that the others were annoyed with the ruckus too so he had the reason to take action.

"Please excuse me" he said then left the room.

"Waitâ€¦" Kondo stood up excused himself and followed Hijikata.

Hijikata slid open the door of the room from which the noise came from and walked in. He was right; the voice did come from her. She was cornered on the wall and three men surrounded her. One of them held her by the wrist.

"You what are you?" said one of the men who was pissed off that they were interrupted as he went to draw his sword at Hijikata who struck the man down with a strike to the side of the neck before he can even draw his sword.

"You pigs" he muttered, feeling really irritated. "How can you gang up on a woman like that?!"

"It's none of your business" the other man ran to him only to be throw down to the floor after having his foot cleverly tripped.

Hijikata went to the third guy who pulled out a dagger. He knew in an instant that the man planned to hostage the girl instead of attacking him. So before that can happen he pulled him away and landed a straight punch in the man's face, knocking him down.

"Are you alright?" he asked as she helped her up.

"Thank you!" she embraced him.

He can feel that she was still trembling and so to calm her, he patted her back.

"Toshi" Kondo stopped what he was going to say when he noticed that he was seeing a different Toshi at the moment. He then realized that there was something between the two.

"Kondo-san I'm sorry for the mess I'll go call someone" Hijikata felt embarrassed to be seen by Kondo like that.

"Don't worry I've done that already" he replied with a smile.

Chizuru then noticed the man standing in the doorway and ducked her head and smiled at him to recognize his presence. The manager and her men came to pick up the guys who cause the ruckus.

The manager sighed. "These men not because they shared the pay, they can already share the girl" she then noticed how her girl looked at ease with the man who stood beside her. "I'm sorry for causing you trouble" the manager ducked her head at the vice commander.

"Never mind that. It's nothing." He replied.

Chizuru moved away and went to her manager. "I'm sorry" she muttered as she stood beside her.

"It's alright. Anyway, you're Hijikata-san right?" the manager inquired with a big smile. The man just nodded in reply. "I would be honored to have you as our guest here anytime. And I'll make sure that Sakura would be available to serve you at any time. Right Sakura?" she turned to the girl next to her who just smiled coyly.

Hijikata didn't reply. He excused himself and walked back to the

meeting room with Kondo who watched him with a smile.

"Is there something wrong?" Hijikata inquired as he looked at Kondo before entering the room.

"You like her don't you" Kondo teased.

"What?" Hijikata raised a brow.

"Never mind. Let's get back and do our best in there" Kondo said with a small laugh as he patted Hijikata's back then went into the room.

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"_â€|__so he was Hijikata Toshizou"_ Chizuru thought, unable to fall asleep thinking of him. It's been almost a week since the incident and she hasn't seen him since then. She was aware that he was a busy man but her wish to see him again never waver. He became the first and last thing on her mind every day. Many times already have she caught herself smiling and looking in the blank space while thinking of him. Even when she's with another man, her thoughts wander off to him. "_Kami-sama, please let me meet him again_" she wished as she closed her eyes.

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Hijikata found himself in the brothel's lobby. He was greeted by the manager with a big smile on her face. He went straight to business and asked for her. He was a man with self-control but he can't bear it anymore. He wanted her badly.

From inside the room he can hear her recite the same lines she said before to announce herself before entering the room along with the rain that just started to pour.

"I'm so glad to see you" she said with a smile as she sat in front of him. "I brought tea this time because I remember that you prefer this over \_sake\_" she moved closer and was about to pour him some tea when he caught her wrist.

"What happened?" he looked really concerned with the bruise on her wrist. She looked away from him and didn't say a word. Of course he has an idea of how she got it so instead of asking her about it he lifted her wrist to his lips and blew it gently and kissed it lightly.

She looked at him. "Thanks. You're too concerned for someone like me"

"Why? What are you?" he said looking her in the eyes.

"A â€|" the word struggled in her mouth. She fought the tears back from her eyes. It seems like after all this time she still hasn't accepted it. "I'm aâ€|"

"You're a woman" he said as he removed the space between them. She looked at him with a sad smile.

He placed a hand on her cheek and erased her lipstick with his thumb,

smudging it a bit to her cheek. "You don't belong here." He said looking at her with adoration. He then kissed her with fervor.

A kiss on the lips isn't really the first thing that a woman like her and a customer would share; most never even mind her lips. Just his kisses were enough to make her mind spin. The way he ran his tongue to part her lips and the way he lightly bit her lip slowly made her want to feel again. Upon breaking the kiss they looked at each other. It wasn't just lust in their eyes, it was something deeper.

"My name is Sakurazuki." she whispered as she kissed his ear and sensuously ran her hands on his back. "is not Sakura" saying one's real name in the business was a big no, for it establishes attachment.

"What is it?" he inquired as he started trailing kisses on her neck making her give out small moans. "Tell me" he slowly slid down her clothes, exposing more of her to him.

"Chizuru" she whispered. For the first time in her life, she felt the need to give all of herself to someone. She started hoping that she's met him earlier but that doesn't matter now. Right now she was in the arms of the man who made her feel again.

"Chizuru" he moaned his name in between kisses. "Allow me to make love to you" he said as he moved her closer to him.

She nodded. "Please I want to make love to you" she moaned as she felt him starting to plant kisses on her shoulders to her chest. She slowly opened his robes with her hand, exposing his well-toned body with signs of scars in some places. She ran her hand down his broad chest and removed his clothes completely with the other. She felt so small but safe in his arms. She was slowly laid down, her body was bare before him but she doesn't mind.

"So soft" he thought as he leaned down on her to brush his lips leisurely from in between her mounds to her abdomen. "So fragile" he planted a kiss before moving back up to give attention to her breasts which drop and fall along with her breathing. Cupping her, feeling her and tasting her and as he did he ran his hand up her leg and in between her thighs, caressing her.

His touch was ecstatic, making her moan in pleasure as he touched another weak spot. She enjoyed the fact that he took his time making each part of her feel loved. This time she doesn't do the pleasing because she was being pleased. She shivered as she felt his hands travelling down her lower region which by the time was already aching for him. She allowed him to explore her with his fingers, sliding down her folds then inside her. The feeling of his hair brushing in her skin as he moved down on her teased her effectively. She can feel him tasting her, sliding his tongue down her sensitive spot making her arch her back in delight.

"Please" she moaned unable to control her hunger for him. "I want you" she ran her fingers in his hair as he focused on her weak spot. He moved himself up so that he can see her face clearly.

She watched as he removed every last piece of clothing on his body and feasted her eyes on the body of the man she was dying to make love to. He lifted her leg up, holding it gently but firmly, she felt him brushing himself to her, teasing her till finally the two of them

became one. The intensity of the pleasure that he was giving her as he moved in her made her feel like an innocent girl once more who have just discovered what the forbidden fruit was all about for the first time. She started moving herself to him, wanting to have all of him inside her. They exchanged moans of pleasure with every movement, drawing each other closer to climax. They made love to each other the whole night. Exploring each other and communicating whatever they felt with their bodies.

Soon dawn was about to give way to the morning sun. Chizuru opened her eyes, feeling happy for the first time in a long time. The first thing her saw was the man she passionately spent the night with. She blushed like a little girl as she remembered bits and pieces of what happened and then smiled.

\_"Even just for this time" I felt like a woman and not a toy."\_ She crawled to reach for her robes and put them on. She noticed that he left some marks on her body but those were the marks she was glad to have for it reminded her of their time together. \_"This time" I loathe the sunrise. It means that I'd have to say goodbye to you and go back to my reality again"\_ she looked down as tears started falling from her eyes.

"Is something wrong?" he inquired as he got up and went to her side.

She looked up at him with a bitter smile. "Good morning" it's nothing really. These are probably tears of joy"

He leaned and kissed her tear drenched cheek. "I'd get you out of here" he said with conviction.

"Eh?" she looked at him, surprised with what he said.

He stood up and gathered his clothes. She went to him and helped him dress. "I better get going while it's still dark." She rested her head on his chest. He wrapped his arms around her. "I've got my duties and I'm the Vice Commander of the Shinsengumi. Even though the easier way of getting you out of here is by buying you I couldn't do such thing. Every penny I earn is for the group and it would cause an uproar in the group if the ever so uptight vice commander do something like that. I hope you understand."

She nodded. "I do. Don't worry about me. Just before I met you I was thinking of taking my own life" but you saved me"

"Wait for me. I'll come back for you and don't you think of taking your own life. I don't know exactly when I could come by with the way things are right now but I'll come and get you. I promise" he said and then he let her loose. He fixed his katana and kodachi on his waist band.

"Hijikata-san" she said his name and it sounded right on her lips.

He smiled gently at her. "I was wondering since last night how you knew my name"

She chuckled. "I heard it last time you were here." Hijikata I'll be waiting" with that he kissed her one last time before

leaving.

#### 4. Vengeance

**\*\*Vengeance\*\***

"\_He would come back for meâ€¦ I know that but do I deserve him. He made me forgot how filthy I amâ€¦ it's like his kisses and touches cleansed me" \_She thought as she washed herself thoroughly. After a week break given to her by the manager, she was forced to return to the way things were again. Last night the man fell asleep before anything can happen which she was thankful for but she wanted to remove the traces of the man's touch and kisses on her body. \_"I really want him to be the only one to own me but that won't be happening anytime soon. I heard that the Shinsengumi got a lot on their hands latelyâ€¦ I wish to see him again." \_

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

It's been almost two weeks since he last saw her. He wanted to be with her once more but not with how things are at the moment but he just thought of a way to contact her. It was embarrassing but it was the most effective idea.

"_Only this onceâ€¦" _ he said as he folded a letter.
"Yamazaki"

"Yes. I'm here" replied the ninja who was waiting outside his door.

"Come in" he ordered and the ninja did so. He turned to him and handed him the letter. He fought his embarrassment and started to explain thing to Yamazaki. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't bother you with personal requests like this but can you hand it to a girl who is called Sakuraâ€¦." Hijikata stopped, feeling bad of having to use Yamazaki as a messenger that way.

"Hijikata-san. You don't have to worry or be shy about it. I understand. I know who to give this to. I remembered her from the time when you went to celebrate your birthday" Yamazaki said with a small smile.

Hijikata sighed. "Thank you" Yamazaki bowed and left the room to do his task.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Chizuru was in the back yard hanging her clothes when she heard someone calling her.

"Sakura." came the soft voice.

She looked around and when she turned around there was a ninja in front of her. She almost screamed in surprise but the man covered her mouth.

"I'm sorry for scaring you but I've got an important letter from Hijikata-san." He said and then removed his hand from her mouth and

handed her the letter.

Chizuru took it and hid it in her clothes. She ducked her head and smiled at the ninja. "Thank you"

"I'll be back for your reply before dark. I'll be waiting here" Yamazaki said and then he ran and climbed the wall as swift as a cat and disappeared.

\_"\_\_A letterâ€| from himâ€|" \_she thought with glee.

She was very careful that no one sees her reading the letter and writing a reply because that sure would put her in danger with the manager. That afternoon, the ninja returned for the reply and disappeared with it once more.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Hijikata can't help but smile upon receiving a reply from Chizuru. "Thank you Yamazaki"

"I hope that Hijikata-san would sigh less now" Yamazaki said with a small smile before leaving.

Hijikata excitedly read her letter. _"This is good" _he thought with a smile. _"She got herself assigned to do the marketing. That means I can see her in town. Tomorrow morning she'd be waiting for me in the old shrineâ€| I'll go meet youâ€|wait for me" _he folded the letter and inserted it in between his notebook.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Chizuru held the basket in her hand tighter as she stood behind the huge tree in the shrine. She knew that if she gets caught meeting someone, she'd be in big trouble but it was a risk she was willing to take.

"Did I keep you waiting?" Hijikata whispered as he slid his arms around her waist. She turned to look up at him.

"No. I'm so happy you could come" she beamed at him.

"But why did they allow you to go out. With this you can escape anytime" he said as he stared at her face which was devoid from any make-up. \_"She's really beautiful" \_

Chizuru shook her head. "They got people on the city border. It would be impossible for me to leave, besides my time outside is monitored. I'd have to get going soon or else they'd start to hunt me down already. I earned the manager's trust. I used to do this when I first came to the brothel and we are short-handed right now. Also if I go and do other work, I'd be able to pay them back faster."

"Chizuru" he said her name which tasted sweet on his lips. He leaned down and planted a kiss on her lips. "You better get going then. This short time wouldn't suffice me but I don't want to be a greedy man so I'm thankful for this" he let her loose.

"In three days. I'd be going out again. Same time. Same place." She said as she tiptoed to kiss his lips one more time before



going.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Hijikata woke up early despite not having enough sleep. He is true to his duty and would work from dawn to dusk if needed. Lately they were experiencing some minor setbacks, which means more work for him, but all in all they were doing pretty well.

"You've got nothing to do this morning, you can get some extra sleep" Kondo said as he saw Hijikata on his way out their headquarters.

"Ohâ€|Kondo-san. Good morning" he smiled at him. "I was just going to check something out. I'll be back in a while."

Kondo laughed. "Toshi, I'm not keeping tabs on you so there's no need to explain. Take your time."

"Kondo-sanâ€|." He muttered. "I'll be going then" he said as he turned to leave.

Upon arriving at the shrine he went to the tree where they met before and waited for her to come. A couple of minutes later he can see her coming closer. He stood up and went to meet her.

"I'm sorry to keep you waiting" she said with a smile as she put down the basket that she had with her.

"I just arrived here myself" he replied. "So how are you doing?"

"Just fine" she replied.

He moved closer to her, to embrace her but surprisingly she moved back. "Is something wrong?" he inquired as he placing a hand on her shoulder. She bit her lip and cringed. Without saying another word he pulled Chizuru's collar down her shoulder, exposing burn marks from cigar and a couple of bruises down her arm.

Chizuru pulled the collar of her clothes back up instantly and tears started welling in her eyes. "Hijikataâ€|don't worry about itâ€|it would just go away" she said as she noticed the furious look on his face.

"Don't worry about it?! How can I not worry about those?!" he exclaimed in anger. "Is there more?" She shook her head as she looked into his cold piercing eyes that seem prepared to kill somebody at any time.

"Wait!" she exclaimed as he carried her in his arms in one scoop and brought her to a secluded place at the back of the shrine.

"Are there any more?" he inquired after putting her down. "I'll strip you myself if you don't answer me" she nodded as tears started rolling down her eyes.

She turned her back and allowed her robe to drop to her waist, exposing to him reddish stripe marks that came from the leather strap that she was hit with. There were a couple more burn marks just below

her shoulder. She fixed her kimono and turned to him.

"What happened? Who did this?" he inquired. She didn't want to tell him because the guy responsible for her burns and bruises was a man from an influential family but she can't keep quiet about it to him either.

"He was one of those who don't really enjoy doing it but takes pleasure in seeing someone in pain... I wasn't the first girl who was unlucky to come across himâ€¦ the first one, he bought her and a week later she died but she was just reported missingâ€¦.Hijikataâ€¦." she moved closer to him and leaned on him, resting her forehead on his chest. She closed her eyes to erase the memories of the night before from her head "I'm afraid that he might buy meâ€¦ he â€¦he reserved me for a weekâ€¦he might come by again tonightâ€¦"

He gently wrapped his arms around her. A frustrated growl escaped his lips. "Tch. I won't let him lay his hands on you again"

"Hijikata please don't do anything rash"

"Of course I won't. What's the guy's name?"

"His nameâ€¦his name was Shibuya Kagerou"

A small smile escaped Hijikata's lips upon hearing the name, because it rang a bell. _"I should go and check the recent reports. I'm sure I read that name in one of them"_ he let her loose. "You better get going now. Be careful. I'm going to get you soon." He leaned down and kissed her then they parted ways.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

That very night Hijikata got his hands on the man named Shibuya Kagerou who came from a well off family. He was right, the guy's name was on the reports and it turns out that he is one of the extremists who were against them. What more the guy was one of those tasked to spy on them.

"We have quite a catch" Shinpachi said as he passed by Hijikata.

"Hijikata-san, if they won't bust, I'm willing to help you make them talk." Okita said with a grin.

"Thanks but I'll handle the interrogation and disposal" replied the vice commander who wasn't in the mood the whole day.

Upon entering the separate house used solely for interrogation and disposal purposes he approached the three where hanged like pigs to the ceiling beam, half naked, their feet just a couple of inches from the ground.

"Answer properly and you might be spared. By the way who among you is Shibuya Kagerou?" he started the interrogation with that stern face of his that most soldiers fear to see. There was no answer. He picked up a wooden sword and was about to hit the first guy when the man next to him spoke.

"Do you need anything?" he said quite arrogantly despite his current

state.

Hijikata gave him a spine chilling glare. "I'd get you last" he thought. He then focused on his job and started interrogating them. He noticed that Shibuya would steal a glance at the men beside him when they are getting beaten up with the wooden sword which broke just after 3 questions. "What a sick guy" \_

When he got all the information he wanted, he draw his sword and slit the men's throat cleanly, leaving Shibuya alive.

"Happy you didn't get your throat slit?" Hijikata inquired as he noticed a smile of victory in Shibuya's lips.

"You want money don't you". You spared me because I can give you money" he laughed maniacally.

Hijikata didn't replied but instead he went to the furnace in the corner of the room. He drew the dagger he had with him and placed half of its blade on the fire.

"Even when clad in gold men like you will always be just garbage." Hijikata said then he picked up the dagger. "Do you know how it feels like to be burned?" he asked as he walked towards him.

"What? what are you doing?! Are you crazy?!" he started panicking but his blabbering stopped when Hijikata placed the hot part of the dagger against his skin. There was a sizzling sound upon the hot metal contacted with the sweaty skin. The man screamed in agony.

"Fuck you!" exclaimed the man, wriggling in pain, as the dagger was removed.

"That was how she felt when you burnt her with your cigar." Hijikata then placed the hot blade against both his cheek. Another scream erupted. "I thought you liked pain but I see that you can't handle them well yourself." Hijikata picked up another wooden sword and wacked the guy several times. Hijikata noticed that the guy seemed to lose consciousness but he can't allow that. He picked up a bucket of cold water and emptied it on the guy.

"I remember now. so that was your girl I messed up last night poor thing cried quietly in pain don't worry she was muttering your name as she lost consciousness" he said weakly but with a smirk.

Hijikata furiously hit him in the gut. He wanted to kill him but not till he's got a taste of his own medicine. He stuffed the guy's mouth with cloth this time to avoid him from biting his tongue then he started to whip the guy. Blood oozed from the broken skin, painting the floor below him. Tears mixed with his snot and sweat.

"Go to hell" the guy muttered half alive after spitting out the cloth in his mouth.

"I'll send you there first" Hijikata drew his sword cut open the man's stomach in one swing. Viscera along with blood and bodily fluids spilled on the floor. Hijikata turned and left the place like nothing happened. "Please dispose of the bodies" he said as he passed

by the men who stood guard outside.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Note:<strong> \_So girls in brothels before aren't allowed to go outside (cause they might escape or costumers might recognize them, maybe) but since this is fictional and for the sake of the story I gave Chi-chan a chance to go out. And yeah about reservations it more like when they have a patron, they are sort of rented or sometimes bought. Anyway if your reading this now THANK YOU for reading this far :)) Please leave a review, it would be well appreciated.\_

## 5. On the Run

**\*\*On the Run\*\***

Chizuru was thankful that the man named Shibuya didn't came for her that night but tonight was another story. She sat in the corner looking blankly in a void, hoping that no one comes and pick her.

"Sakura" the manager called for her with a smile. "Someone asked for you. 2nd floor 3rd room to the right." Chizuru nodded with a forced smile in reply.

"Don't worry. This might not be as bad as the last one" Akane said to her with a smile as she held Chizuru's hand when she stood up.

"I hope so" Chizuru replied before going.

\_"\_\_I don't think I can spend one more night with another manâ€¦|\_" she thought as she held back her tears. She knelt in front of the door and announced herself before coming in. "Master, I'm Sakura, I would be your companion forâ€¦|." She started but stopped after recognizing the man in front of her.

"Sakura, we've got something important to discuss" said Yamazaki as he came closer to her.

"You're the ninjaâ€¦|" Chizuru said looking closely at the man in front of her.

Yamzaki nodded with a smile. "Now listen. Hijikata sent me here to discuss with you the plans for your escape." He said in a soft voice.

"He didâ€¦|" she moved closer to him.

"Yes. He's really worried about you. He would've bust you out of here earlier but there's a lot going on right now and we thought of where to hide you after your escape since it's sure that you'd be hunted down. Anyway, tomorrow as soon as it gets dark go to the store room on the end of the hallway. I've cut the window grill already, so you just have to remove the frame and jumped down. We'd be waiting for you."

Tears started flowing uncontrollably from her eyes and then she embraced Yamazaki. "Thank youâ€¦|I've always been afraid to do it

myself " Thank you "

Yamazaki moved away, his face all red in embarrassment. "It's nothing, ah also I hid men's clothing in one of the boxes next to the window in the store room. Wear it before escaping."

"Well, is there anything I can do for you in return?" Chizuru said with a small smile.

"Eh, well, Hijikata-san have told me that you sing so beautifully that you can make cherry blossoms bloom out of season" Yamazaki laughed. "So, can I at least confirm that?"

Chizuru giggled. "I never thought that I sounded that good, but sure. I'll try my best to live up to what he said".

After 2 songs Chizuru stopped and it was pretty obvious that the man in front of her was mesmerized. "So how was it?"

"It was, well, it was amazing." He said with a red face. "Also, I believe I understand why the vice commander fell for you, You'd be able to balance him out. That's what I think anyway" Yamazaki stood up. "Well, I'd be going now. I still have something to do. Good luck tomorrow" he said then he exited the room through the window and disappeared.

~~~~~

"You've overslept. That's new" Akane said as Chizuru got up from her futon. "Our shift is about to start. Go and get ready now."

"Sure" Chizuru smiled at Akane. "Sorry, but I'd be leaving you behind, Thank you" she thought as she stood up and hugged her friend.

"What's up?" Akane asked as he turned to Chizuru.

"Nothing. I just felt like hugging someone" she replied then her friend hugged her.

"There you go. A hug feels nice eh? Anyway you better get dolled up now." Akane said as she let her friend go and let the room.

Chizuru folded her futon and looked around the room she shared with ten other women one last time. She walked out the room and down the hall as casually as she can despite the fact that her heart is racing in anxiousness.

"Sakura" the manager saw her. "Still not dolled up? Well, go and fix yourself and earn me some bucks" the manager said with a small laugh as she passed her.

"I'm sorry. I'm going now" she replied and she picked up pace. Upon reaching the 2nd floor, more of her co-workers were around which made it extra hard for her to sneak into the storage room. After a couple of minutes of waiting and making casual talk with people who she passes by, she reached the storage room and quickly snuck in.

As soon as she got inside, she stripped her clothes and searched for the clothes that was left for her. She found them in a box near the

window, just like she was told. As she was starting to dress, she heard loud voices coming closer to the storeroom. It seems like two men just stopped in front of the storage room. Chizuru gathered her clothes and jumped in the huge barrel at the back of the stack of boxes and _sake_ containers. The door opened and the men went in. The two seem to take their precious time, chatting as they took containers of _sake_ out from the room.

_"Come onâ€¦go awayâ€¦"_Chizuru thought impatiently as she closed her eyes. Hoping that she won't get caught or she doesn't make any sound. After a while the room returned to its quiet state and the door was shut close. She finished dressing up and stacked another box on top of the other.

"Have you seen Sakura?" Chizuru heard the voice of the manager.

"No, madame" replied two other ladies in unison.

"Where is that girl? A costumer is requesting for her." The manager said sounding irritated as she walked away.

Chizuru then hurriedly climbed up and removed the frame of the window grill. She struggled on how she'd jump out, head or feet first. She stuck her head out and pushed half her body out the window. She felt her heart jump as she realize how high she was from the ground but all her fears disappeared the moment she spotted Hijikata waiting for her below.

"Move it. Just jump. I'll catch you" he said in a soft voice as he looked up then around the alley.

Chizuru finally made it out of the window and balanced herself on the small ledge below before jumping down. Hijikata caught her without fail.

"Let's get out of here" he said as he placed her down and held her hand tightly. They quickly went to the other end of the alley which was blocked by a tall fence but after lifting away one of the planks they were able to slip through to the other side with ease. With long strides they strode down a series of long narrow alleys which lead to another area. Upon reaching the main street, the two changed their pace into a more casual one.

Hijikata let go of her hand. She walked right next to him not knowing what to say.

"They'd be looking for you. Probably they are now" Hijikata muttered as they crossed the bridge. He then stopped in front of a shabbily dressed traveler selling charms. "Yamazaki, make sure to tell me how they progress with the search" the man then just nodded in affirmation.

Not a word was exchanged until they reached the old shrine where they usually meet. They went to the secluded place behind the shrine.

"So it was that easy to bust you out." Hijikata said with a small smile.

Chizuru embraced him. "Thank you"

"They'd be after you but I have a plan" he moved away from her. He turned her around, drew his sword and held her hair in his hand. "I'm sorry I have to improvise" he said as he chopped her hair off.

She turned around with a surprised look on her face, touching her hair which was cut short just above her shoulder. She knew she was going to miss that waist length hair of hers but if it was part of the plan to hide her then she wouldn't mind.

"There, you look a little more like a boy now." He said with a smile as he handed her the hair he chopped off. "Now I want you to listen carefully. I'll explain to you my plan. This might be a bit challenging but if you can pull this off then you'd be saved." He started explaining the plan to her. At first she was unsure if it would work but she's got faith in him so she agreed to do everything he said.

"You'd be on your own for a while but we'll be able to meet again soon" he handed her a short sword. "Here. What is a man without his sword? Protect yourself with this" he pulled her to him and held her. "Be careful."

She tip toed and planted a kiss on his lips. "Thank you" she then pulled away from him and went on her way. "I love you" she whispered as she looked back one last time at the man who saved her.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Chizuru sat up and rubbed her eyes as she yawned. She had a peaceful sleep with no nightmares at all. It's been a week since she escaped from the brothel and she couldn't believe that she would be taken in by the monks from the temple. Currently she was a helper and there were tons of cleaning to do but she was still thankful to the gods for it was a hundred folds better than selling herself.

She got up and changed into her attire as a man. After escaping the brothel she went straight to the temple and pretended to be someone who is in need of dire help. She told the monks some made up story, which made her feel really guilty, about how she just lost all her family in Edo, got robbed of the last bits of her money upon arriving in Kyoto and almost sliced to death by some drunk rogue warriors whom she bumped into. The monks pitied her and allowed her to stay with them.

Three days passed before the head monk found out that she was actually a girl but they didn't mind it and told her that there must be some good reason as to why she was pretending to be a boy. She just told them that she thought travelling as a boy would keep her safe than when she travels as a girl. The monks though didn't ask for any further explanation and didn't mind if she continued to pretend a boy.

"\_When will I see you again?"\_ she thought of Hijikata as she looked down the big puddle of water that reflected her image. "\_I've gotten used to seeing myself wearing all those make up and I missed seeing this old face"\_ she smiled weakly. "\_I do have a face of a kid and no one would know my story just by looking at me."\_ She walked away from the puddle and grabbed the long broom. "\_I would never be able to forget but I should try to move on. I've been given a chance

to live a new life now."\_ She started sweeping and the wind suddenly blew past her. \_"The windsâ€¦ I don't know where they'll take me but I'm not afraid"\_ she thought as she continued with her chores.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

After saying some prayers, Hijikata proceeded to his original motive for visiting the temple. He wanted to check out the temple to see if it was indeed a perfect place to turn into their next headquarters but above that he wanted to see her. He quietly moved around the place in hopes to see her.

_"__Chizuruâ€¦"_ he thought as he finally saw the object of his visit. She just finished hanging clothes and blankets and she sat down a nearby stone bench to take a break. Slowly he approached her.

She wiped the dripping sweat from her forehead and took a deep breath. She then watched the clothes she hanged as they carelessly waved as the wind passed. In her mind she listed the other things she had to do but her thoughts suddenly went blank and her heart pounded like the drums as a figure emerged from in between the fluttering linens. For a while she can't believe her eyes.

"How's the temple?" he spoke as he stopped in front of her.

With a huge smile on her face she replied. "Great"

He then leaned down and held her. "I couldn't stop thinking about you. Sorry I wasn't able to drop by earlier."

She flushed as he held her and hid her face on his shoulder. "It's alright"

He let her loose and stared at her eyes which welled of tears then he brushed his lips against her and kissed her. As soon as the kiss got a bit torrid, Chizuru pulled away, her cheeks the color of the blossoms.

"The monksâ€¦".she chuckled. "They might catch usâ€¦"

He sighed and sat next to her. "Tch. It's not like I care if they do." He glanced at her and placed an arm around her. "I really wanted to see you" he said as he pulled her closer.

"I wanted to see you so badly too" she muttered.

"The search for you has already died down but the manager was pretty upset to lose you. The thing though is if they catch you, you'd be in trouble and when that happens I might not be around to help you, so try not to go out that much ok?"

"Our headquarters might be moved here in a month" he said letting her loose. "When that happens I'll get to see you everyday"

"But that means you have to make the monks agree to lend you the place right?"

He nodded. "The monks would hate us but we have no choice. We have to

move headquarters" He stood up and looked around. "I'll try to drop by when I can" he glanced at her then started walking away.

"Take careâ€|.I'll be waiting" she muttered as he disappeared from her sight.

* * *

><p>Note: _Gonna be updated in a week probably. Hope your enjoying it so far. :)) Please feel free to let me know what you think about the fic XOXO_

6. Precarious Convergence

****Precarious Convergence****

"Those men! What do they take us for?" said one of the monks looking really irritated.

"There are really those who have forgotten to respect us" replied another then a pool of buzzing voices from different conversations filled the room.

"Silence!" called one of the elder monks and everyone hushed on an instant.

Chizuru who was walking by outside the main hall of the temple stopped behind a column to listen.

The elder monk who stopped the commotion cleared his throat and started to speak. "I understand how you feel about the Shinsengumi turning our place into their new headquarters but please calm down. There are reasons as to why we decided to let them stay here and it's not only because they had a really threatening aura when they talked us about the dealâ€|."

Chizuru decided to stop listening and walked away. In her mind the image of Hijikata walking into the temple earlier that morning followed by a couple more men played. When she first met him he has an intimidating air around him. His expressionless face lets one wonder what he is thinking at the moment and his eyes could send chills down ones spine. Yet despite that first impression of him he has showed her another side of him. That morning though when he walked into the temple for business he was more imposing. Chizuru overheard some younger monks call him the demon vice commander as they talked about him and the Shinsengumi which made her wonder if how horrible Hijikata can get. She still didn't know much about him despite everything that has happened but she couldn't care much about that because he too still has a lot to know about her.

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Chizuru opened her eyes immediately as she heard the muffled sliding of her door. The moment she sat up to see who it was that entered the room, an arm has already gone around her shoulder and a hand covered her mouth to keep her from shouting. She almost squirmed out from his grasp but she can recognize the arms that held her anywhere so she calmed down.

"I'm sorry" he whispered as he brushed his lips down the side of her neck. "I didn't mean to scare you" he said after planting a soft kiss in her ear making her shiver in brief pleasure. He removed his hand from her mouth and pulled her closer to him.

"How did you know which room I'm staying in?" she asked as she placed a hand on his forearm, planting a kiss on it before glancing back at him. He has a firm but soft expression in his face and despite the darkness of the room she can recognize the pair of eyes that made her hold her breath upon meeting his gaze.

He chuckled as he slowly slid her sleeping robe down her slender arms. "I can locate my target even in a moonless night with minimal reconnaissance. How much harder would it be to locate you?"

A small smile formed on her lips as she helped him remove her robe from her body. "Is it alright for you to be here?"

"I don't know" he glided his lips down the curve of her neck to her shoulder. "You tell me"

She can feel him starting to undo the cloth she wears around her chest to hide her breasts, since she was supposed to be a boy, but she placed a hand over his to stop him.

"Is something wrong?" he asked.

"Wellâ€¦ the monksâ€¦ they might find us orâ€¦." She muttered, her heart fluttering.

He interrupted her with a light kiss on the cheek. "We'll keep quiet. Besides all of them are sleeping on a different area" he continued with what he's doing but grunted as he found it very tasking to remove the cloth around her chest. "Tsk. What a hindrance" he muttered as he pulled away the round of cloth from her.

"That is necessary though. I don't have much to hide but stillâ€¦" she said in a soft voice, looking down her exposed mounds.

He slipped his hands around her waist and cupped her breasts, filling both his hands with her. "They are more than enough for me though"

She placed a hand over each of his hands and removed them then she turned to him and planted a kiss on his lips. He returned the kiss aggressively. From her lips he started trailing kisses down her chin to her neck. As he did so, she started to slip her hand into his clothes, sliding them off him.

She can find no words to express how happy she was that he came to lavish her with his love that night. He kept her moans muffled with both his hand and lips. Trying to keep things as quiet as possible made their love making feel so wrong but everything just feels so right when she was in his arms.

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Chizuru groggily sat up and covered herself with her robe as she felt Hijikata got up and started dressing. She fell back on her futon,

still a bit weary from what transpired, and watched him as he fixed himself. She smiled upon noticing that it was the first time that she saw him with his hair down and if not for his manly physique he could be mistaken as a woman with the silky raven hair that he had.

"Chizuru" he muttered as he sat down next to her. "Once the headquarters moves here I'm afraid things might get more complicated between you and me" he looked down at her and continued. "We would be seeing each other but not like this."

She sat up and placed a hand on his arm. "It's alright. As long as I can see you every day that's what's important with me"

"_But what about me? Would I be contented with just seeing you? Would I be able to hold back when you're always around?" _He thought then sighed. "I'd drop by anytime next week to give you another set of men's clothing. Please try and practice moving a bit more manly. I haven't thought of how to get you to work under my supervision but I'd tell you as soon as I have something in mind"

"I'll work under your supervision?"

"Of course I'd want to keep an eye on you. Living in a headquarters filled with men might be really taxing for you but don't worry I'll figure something out"

"Alright" she said with a smile then she started to look around.

"What's wrong?" he inquired as he watched her put on her robe and crawl out of bed to reach for a small comb.

"Can I comb your hair?" she asked as she returned to his side.

He didn't reply right away but he turned his back to her. "Sure" he replied feeling a bit embarrassed to have someone fix his hair for him.

She knelt and started combing his hair. She blushed as she remembered how she dug her fingers onto his hair which eventually removed his hair from the piece of cloth which held it together into a neat ponytail. After a while she stopped combing his hair and looked around for the piece of cloth which got removed in the midst of their activity. She found it just behind her pillow and began to tie his hair back up.

"There you go" she said as she finished fixing his hair.

He glided his hand down his hair and stood up. "Thank you" he muttered then he turned to her. "I'd be going now" he leaned down to plant a kiss on her forehead. "Take care" then with those last words he left her room and disappeared into the shade of the night.

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"Yukimura, I'd go get the herbs needed for the medicine. I hope the old man have everything we need right now" the young monk in training said worriedly as he started to go off to another

direction.

"Alright. I'd go get the doctor then" Chizuru went her own way in a hurry.

Sometime just after dinner, one of the five elder monks collapsed just outside his room and his left arm was paralyzed. Chizuru being one of the first to find the old man was sent along with a young monk to go fetch the doctor and some herbs for the old man's medicine.

"\_\_It should be just around the market" \_\_Chizuru turned her head here and there to remember where the market was. As she looked around she suddenly stopped in the middle of the road, she remembered something important. \_"I shouldn't be out on the streetsâ€|.What if someone recognizes me?"\_ she then shook her head and started to move forward. \_"This is no time to think about myself. An old man is dying and is in need of assistance"\_\_

She kept a fast pace as she tried to count the number of streets from the bridge to the doctor's house. \_"15 streets from the bridgeâ€|I'm in the 8\_\_th\_\_ nowâ€|Am I even going in the right direction?"\_

"You little!" a man who reeked of alcohol grunted as Chizuru ran past him, grazing his arm.

Chizuru looked back and ducked her head a bit. "I'm sorry" she said then turned to move on.

"Hey brat! Apologize properly!" he exclaimed. The few people who were still out on the streets stopped to see what the problem was.

Chizuru didn't look back, afraid to confront the man, but the man went after her and placed an arm on her shoulder then spun her around.

"Do you know who you bumped?!" The man looked down on her. "You wanna die?!" he threatened.

"I didn't bump into you." Chizuru replied and removed the man's hand from her shoulder. "I'm sorry. I'm in a hurry" she said and just as she was about to turn away she thought that the man's face was familiar. \_"Oh no! He's one of the hounds from the brothel!"\_ as she remembered why he was familiar, she quickened her pace.

"You bastard!" the man exclaimed then he paused to watch her go. "Wait a second" the man muttered. "Hey you! Bastard! Come back here!" he screamed as he went after Chizuru.

Chizuru glanced back with a fear filled look in her eyes then tried to continue on like nothing matters. \_"I hope he doesn't recognize meâ€|.pleaseâ€|"\_\_

"You stop when I tell you to stop you son of a bitch!" he said, finally catching up to her. He grabbed her shoulder then spun her around, this time with more force that it almost sent her off balance to the floor.

"Let go of me!" she demanded as she pulled away from the guy who was

looking closely at her face.

"No way!" a grin appeared on the man's face. "I'm sure it's you. I would never forget the face of the woman I've lusted upon for so long."

Chizuru took a couple of steps back. Her legs felt like stones in fear. "What are you talking about?"

The man laughed then grabbed her wrist, pulling her closer to him. "Sakura" he muttered as he sniffed her.

Her eyes widened in shock. Quickly she looked around to see if anyone was around but there was not a single soul in sight anymore. "Let go of me! I'm not Sakura. Can't you see! I'm a boy!" she tried to pull away.

Another laugh erupted. "A boy with a face as adorable as yours! Then maybe I wouldn't mind trying my own kind then"

Chizuru tried to pull away with all the force she has left in her body, this time she was successful. She held her breath as she started running down smaller alleys. She wanted to shout for help but her voice got stuck on her throat. Besides calling for help mean attracting more attention. Authorities would be involved and when she gets questioned her secret might get blown.

She was aware that the man was after her. She temporarily forgets about finding the doctor and ran for her life. She was about to take another step when she tripped on a stone. She failed to keep her balance and fell on the ground.

"Got you now" he pulled her up roughly.

She shivered as she met his impious gaze. "No" she muttered. "Help!" she whispered then he pushed her to the stone wall to her right.

"Since you gave me a hard time, if I find no balls down there, I'd tell the manager I've found her Sakura. I'm sure she'd make the boys feast on you as a punishment" he said. "Now let's see what you have down there" he grinned as his other hand reached for her hakama.

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"Stop! Help!" she exclaimed as she shut her eyes close.

Like an answered prayer, the man's hold of her loosened and as she opened her eyes, the man's eyes were bulging and blood flowed out his mouth. With a pained groan the man dropped dead on the floor.

Her vision dimmed for a while as she smelled death and stared down the twitching body whose blood soaked the earth. She trembled and opened her mouth to scream once more but a hand covered her mouth and pushed her to the wall, pinning her to stop her from moving.

Her gaze met a set of crimson eyes that shone like gems under the pale moonlight that illuminated the alley they were in. Her body froze and she just stared back at him. After a while the hand was lifted from her mouth and the man took a couple of steps back. She took a sweeping look at the man who stood in front of her and

realized how attractive the guy was, with his daunting but noble air and his pale golden hair which perfectly matched his eyes. It was no time to swoon and drool over someone though, there was a dead man in front of her and she still had to get the doctor.

"Ah!" she opened her mouth to speak but the guy sheathed his sword and started to walk away. She ducked her head. "Thank You!"

He stopped and looked back at her. "You" he paused to take a good look at her. "You shouldn't be wandering these parts of town at this time"

"I'm sorry for any inconvenience I've caused" she ducked her head again. "I really have to get to the doctor"

"The doctor's house is 10 streets down after you leave this alley. It's next to the \_sake \_merchant's place." He replied and disappeared as he turned the corner.

Chizuru wasted no time and ran to the doctor's place. It seems like a really eventful night for her because just a block away from the doctor's place, she witnessed another bloody scene.

"Hijikata!" she muttered as she hid behind the stacked barrels outside some store.

He was alone and two men lay dead before him, their swords still in their hands. With his back turned from her, he swung his sword to remove the blood from it before sheathing it once more. His light blue \_haori \_swayed calmly as a gust of wind passed by then he turned to her direction. His cold expression made the hair on her nape stand.

"You there!" he called out. "You're going to suffer the same fate as this two whether you come out from there or not!"

"\_\_This man! is he really?"\_ she thought in surprise as it was the first time she's meet the demon side of the vice commander. She covered her mouth to keep her from gasping as she heard his footfalls approaching. For a while she wasn't sure whether to jump out or just stay where she is, either way she knew that she'd get scolded if he finds out she was out on the streets at the time of night.

"Hijikata" she said as she peeked out from behind the barrels.

He removed his hand from his \_katana\_ and didn't expect that it was her hiding. "Chizuru" he muttered as he quickly went to her. "What were you doing out here at this time of night? Haven't I told you not to go out unless you really need to do so!?" he scolded.

He was obviously angry and she has to say something fast. "I'm sorry but!" She started to explain but was interrupted.

"You know what would happen if someone recognizes you. You would be back to that wretched place or worse" he said then let out a sigh and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Aside from that the streets of Kyoto aren't the safest at the moment; I told you that already haven't I?"

"I'm really sorry for worrying you." She ducked her head. "There's an emergency in the temple and I have to go get the doctor." That's why I came out." The old monk looks like he was dying and being one of the first to find him in the situation he was in, I couldn't just stand around and do nothing" she explained, still with her eyes casted down on the ground.

Another sigh escaped Hijikata's lips. "I understand" he said as he placed a hand on her cheek. She looked up at him and noticed that his expression seemed softer now.

"The doctor's place is just around the corner. I'd walk you there." He said as he walked ahead of her.

She nodded and followed him. As they passed by the dead bodies she couldn't help but look at them and cringe. "Killing men are probably a normal thing to him" she thought as she stared at the waving ends of the white cloth that he wore on his head. "The way he looked after finishing those men off..."

"So what do you think?" he glanced back at her. He was aware that she was shocked to see him take lives. "This is what I do."

She didn't reply right away and picked up her pace so that she was just a couple of steps behind him. "Your duty requires it"

He suddenly stopped in front of a short pathway lined with shrubs, leading to a small house with a faint light coming out the windows. He turned to her. "Here's the doctor's house. Go get him and be on your way"

She nodded and was about to make her way to the house when the front door slid open. A man appeared on the doorway with a bucket in hand. He didn't expect to see people in front of his house but he smiled at them. "Is there anything I can..." He paused upon setting his eyes on Hijikata. "What does the Shinsengumi need from me?"

"Nagi-san, I need your help. A monk in the temple fainted all of a sudden after dinner. He was conscious when I left but he needs to get checked immediately. I was asked to look for you since you're his doctor." Chizuru explained taking a couple of steps forward.

"Ah!" the doctor replied as he emptied the contents of the bucket on the shrubs. "Hojo! That old man really has to take my prescriptions more seriously" he scratched his head. "Wait for me for a while. I'll just get my things" quickly he went back to his house.

"I'd be going now." Hijikata turned to Chizuru.

She nodded with a small smile. "Thanks." she stopped when a group of men emerged from the corner.

"Hijikata-san." A man also wearing the same light blue haori as Hijikata called to him. He had a white cloth around his neck and he wore his sword on his right side, behind him stood five other men who wore the same haori.

Hijikata turned then walked towards the man. "Saitou. Let's continue with our patrolling."

"Did something happened?" he asked upon seeing that the vice commander was with someone in front of a doctor's house.

"Nothing to worry about. Just helped the boy with some trouble" he replied. "You!" Hijikata looked back to Chizuru with a cold expression. "Be on your way and stick with the doctor." He commanded.

Without saying a word she just ducked her head and went to meet the doctor on his doorstep. \_"So we'd have to be strangers around everyone else." \_ She thought as she watched the group disappear one by one as they turned into another street. \_"but that's alrightâ€|I'm sure that soon we won't have to act like strangers around others anymore"\_

"That boy sure was lucky. To think that the vice commander saved his ass" said one of the men walking behind Hijikata and Saitou.

"It was nothing." Hijikata said with a stern voice. "We proceed to the area just across the bridge. Get in position as planned as soon as we get there. The 10th division should be there waiting by now"

"Yes" the men answered in unison as they marched forward.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Note:<strong> \_Hi! Hi! Hi! \_\_I feel a bit weird writing Chizuru not as the innocent girl she was in the series hahaha! As I was writing Hijikata here I'm trying to imagine a man in love and longing for his lover (I believe that he's capable of being soft and romantic \*based on season 2 scenes with Chizuru\*) but I'm trying to keep his scowling, furrowed brows side and I hope I'm not failing to do so. Anyway please leave a review, I'd really love to hear from you guys :3\_

## 7. Closing in

**\*\*Closing in\*\***

It was a busy day in the temple as everyone was cleaning up the place in preparation for the number of people that would flood in that evening. A festival is being held just a couple of streets away from the temple and being the nearest temple to the event, it was sure that many people would drop by to pray and make a wish to gods.

"Yukimura" called one of the elderly monks, stopping Chizuru from wiping the floor clean. "We'd be really beat after this. I was wondering if you can go buy some \_dango \_for snacks. It would really go well with the tea given to us by that merchant yesterday"

"Sure. No problem." She replied with a nod. "I'd just go change." She said as she noticed that her clothes were covered with dust.

"Alright" the elder monk replied and went on his way.

She changed into her blue kimono and black \_hakama\_, which was



brought to her by Hijikata just the other day. It was a hand me down and she had to patch part of the kimono but it fitted her perfectly. After changing she quickly went to the \_dango \_stall just around the area. The moment she went out the temple she remembered how Hijikata scolded her again about going out when he visited her but she can't refuse the old monks request, since it's one of the few things she could do to repay them for their kind heartedness for her. \_"Besides, the sun is up. What could go wrong?"\_ she thought as she looked up the paper lanterns that lined the streets.

She returned as quickly as she can after getting her hands on the \_dango.\_ As she entered the shrine grounds she noticed a man standing in front of the main shrine. She decided to just go pass him, since he was probably just another visitor, but she took a second glance at him and realized that she's seen the man before. The man's eyes caught hers and walked towards her, stopping only when he was a couple of steps away from her.

"You." He looked at her from head to toe. "Where are the elder monks?"

\_""He probably doesn't remember me"\_ she thought. "They're currently in the building in the north end preparing for tonight."

"Is that so? Then can you bring me to them? I have some business with them"

She nodded. "Sure" then she started to walk ahead of him.

"So you stay here." he said with his low but soothing voice. "but you surely aren't a monk in training"

Chizuru stopped and turned to him. "Uhmâ€¦"

"You thought I don't remember you" he smirked.

She ducked her head. "Thanks again for helping me the other night"

He just looked at her and started to walk ahead. She caught up with him and walked next to him. Upon reaching the building where the elder monks were she handed the \_dango\_ to an apprentice monk who was responsible for food.

"Excuse me" she knelt outside the room. Before she can say anything more the monks turned their way and stood up.

"Kazama-san" said one of them with a slight bow.

"Saionji, I believe we have something to discuss" Kazama said without even greeting the elder monks with a bow. Chizuru noticed that the monks don't seem to mind his arrogance around them. Saionji left and led Kazama to another room, followed by the two other elder monks. Chizuru wanted to eavesdrop but one of the apprentices called her to help in the kitchen.

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"You there" the familiar voice called Chizuru's attention and she stopped walking.

"Huh?" she turned around and saw that the man called Kazama was walking towards her.

"Are you aware that soon this place would no longer belong to the monks?"

"What do you mean by that? The monks would always be in charge of the place even if some people move in here" she explained, aware that he was talking about the Shinsengumi moving their headquarters in the temple.

"Well, they will be in charge of the place but things would change around here soon." He crossed his arms on his chest.

"And so?"

"This would no longer be a place fit for a woman. You should leave while you can" he said as he started to walk away.

Chizuru's jaw almost dropped. _"My disguiseâ€¦is it that bad?"_ she thought then followed him. "Wait!" He stopped and turned to her. "How did youâ€¦"

"How did I know?" he said then chuckled. "A man would never shriek like you do"

"Eh?!" she then remembered how she cried for help the other night.

He was about to turn away from her but she tugged his sleeve. "What's it now?"

"Please" she ducked her head. "Don't tell anyoneâ€¦"

"Who would I tell?" he interrupted. As she looked up at him, he realized how innocent and fragile she looked with a faint glimmer in her eyes that enticed him to her. He smirked and leaned down, so that their face would be in the same level. He quickly but gently ran a finger down the side of her face. "Such a shame that a beauty like you would have to hide in men's clothing. I wonder why?" he smirked as she quickly moved a step back.

"That's none of your business" she said looking him in the eyes, trying to exude a tough aura.

"I wasn't planning to ask" he said with a small laugh. "See you around" he muttered as he started to walk away.

"Huh?" she took another step but stopped when she saw Hijikata walking in front of a small group of men up the stairs. _"The Shinsengumi. I should go tell the monks"_ she went to a nearby tree and left her broom before running off to one of the main building.

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Hijikata saw Chizuru standing in front of the temple with a broom in her hand as he was nearing the top steps of the temple stairs.

\_"She's really doing her part to help out"\_ he thought, a small smile

escaped his lips. That was when his eyes met those of a man who was just making his way down. He noticed that the man's eyes were crimson and his hair was pale, surely not someone he's seen before.

A slight smirk formed on Kazama's lips as his eyes met with a man who was followed by those who wore a light blue \_haori. \_On an instant he knew that he must be one of the leaders of the \_Shinsengumi\_.  
\_"Interesting. I never thought I'd run into these guys today" \_he diverted his look as soon as the man with the dark stern eyes turned his gaze away from him. \_"Shinsengumi huh?"\_ he thought as he continued down the short set of stairs.

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_"__The Shinsengumi would be moving here in a few days."_ Chizuru thought as she sat down one of the stone benches behind the shrine.

"Sakura" a soft voice called her from behind one of the pillars. Chizuru stood up and went to the source of the voice.

"The ninja!" she exclaimed.

"Hijikata-san has a message for you" Yamazaki handed her a letter folded into a crane.

Chizuru received it in her palm and smiled at it. "Thank you..." the moment she looked up the ninja was no longer around. Quickly, she went to her room and undid the folds.

_"__I won't be able to drop by the temple till we move our headquarters. Tomorrow at noon, meet me at the old shrine where we used to meet."_ She read the letter with his voice in her mind.

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Chizuru was walking in a quick pace, wanting to arrive to the shrine earlier than Hijikata. There weren't that much people on the streets so it was easier to move around. She was already near the shrine when she saw Kazama who was walking towards her direction. She didn't slow down despite noticing that he has his eyes on her.

He held her arm as soon she walked pass him. "You should try doing a better job at pretending like you don't see me. What's the hurry?"

She looked at him. Her heart started pounding both with the sudden fear from the dominant aura he emits and friction as they touched. "I just have to go somewhere. Why should I tell you anyway?"

He chuckled, smelling her tension as he held her, so he let her go. She continued on like nothing happened. He noticed that she was heading for the direction of the old shrine. "Hey, you!" he called.

Chizuru stopped to look back. "Hhmn?"

"Don't you stay at a huge temple?" he asked crossing his arms casually as he locked his eyes with hers. "But you still walk this

far to visit that rundown shrine. What are you? Planning to be a holy woman?"

"What if I do? It's really none of your concern" she replied with a pout as she started to get annoyed with Kazama. \_"This guy. Why do I have to keep running into him?"\_

He smirked at her. "If you become a holy woman then I'd never get a chance with you"

She was taken aback with what he said. "What chance?"

Kazama was about to say another word but noticed that someone was walking towards their direction and it wasn't just anybody, it was the man from the Shinsengumi which he saw the other day.

"Till next time" He smiled slyly then turned to go.

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"Chizuru" Hijikata called in an indifferent manner with furrowed brows as he was nearing her.

Chizuru almost jumped in surprise. Turning around, she was greeted by Hijikata's stern face which told her that he wasn't in a good mood. She was about to say something but he walked past her then towards the shrine just after a path lined with aged trees.

"Uhhmmmâ€¦|Is something wrong?" she asked as soon as he stopped walking.

He turned to her still with the same expression on his face. "I didn't knew that you were acquainted with someone here in Kyoto"

_"_Oh no! He must've seen me speaking with that Kazama guy"_ she thought. "I'm not acquainted with anyoneâ€¦|"

"Then who was that guy? He looked like someone who was pretty glad to see you" he interjected.

"Eh?! Noâ€¦|I just ran into him here."

"Do you know him?" he asked in an irritated manner, one of his furrowed brows rising a bit as he spoke.

She shook her head. "Not really. That guyâ€¦|" she started. She thought of telling him that he saved her life but that might infuriate him even more if he learns that she got into trouble. "He went to the shrine to talk to the monks the other day, that's where I first met him."

"And?" he said sounding pissed.

"And we talked a bit when I brought him to the monks."

_"_I did saw that guy in the temple that day when there was a festival"_ Hijikata suddenly remembered the man with the crimson eyes. "What business did he have with the monks?"

"I don't know. I helped in the kitchen afterwards"

He didn't say anything more then walked towards a nearby tree for shade, since the sun was at its peak, then leaned back. Chizuru stood next to him and stole glances at him in the short while of silence between them, trying to see if he was still in a bad mood.

"Chizuru" he turned to her. "When we move to the temple in 4 days, we'd be busy moving our things and assigning quarters on the first day. Try not to come out the whole day since the place would be sprawling with men. I don't want you to get into any incident that might cause your identity to be revealed."

"Alright" she said with a nod.

"We have to let them know though that you exist to give you a chance to work under me. I was thinking about making you my attendant"

"An attendant" she muttered, listing in her mind the responsibilities that might cover.

"I was actually considering sending you someplace else" he glanced at her and saw the mix of surprise and fear in her eyes. "What we're doing is pretty risky; I don't know how things would unfold. It would be hard to fool anyone that you're man for a prolonged period of time. It might be easy to pull it off if it was just short encounters"

"Butâ€|butâ€|. I don't want to be away from you" she looked at him with a pretty upset look in her eyes. "I'd do my best to keep the secret! I promise I'd try not to screw up. I'm practicing to move more like a man and I can even speak in a manlier voice"

He chuckled and placed a hand over her head. "I said I was considering the idea but obviously we're not going through with it" he took his hand away from her head. "Just trust me. We'll pull through"

She smiled warmly at him. "I'm just glad that I'd get to see you more often and I'd be of use to you"

"What are you saying?"

"I mean, if I'm your attendant then I'd be able to do something to pay you back for everything you've done for me so far" she said blushing slightly as she clasped her hands together.

"Stupid" he said with a low groan. "What I did wasn't a debt you have to pay. It was something I decided myself."

"Butâ€|" she muttered.

"Chizuru" he straightened up. "Staying beside me wouldn't be easy"

"I don't care. It doesn't matter where you go. I'd follow." She looked at him with conviction. "And no matter what happens in the future. I promise to stay with you" She reached for his hand and held it gently in between her palms.

He snickered, held her cheek and caressed it with his thumb. "It scares me when you promise me things like that"

She lifted his hand which she was holding, brushed her lips on the back of his hand and planted a kiss on it. "I'm so happy I get to see you today"

"You're making it harder for me to control myself when you act like that" he sighed then his face suddenly turned stern once more. "By the way, Chizuru, I don't want you talking to that guy again."

"Hijikataâ€|" she muttered.

"If he even tries to flirt with you tell me and I'd give him a taste of my wrath" he scowled.

"__Is he jealous?"_ she thought, flustered with how he was reacting. "Alrightâ€|"

"Things are different now Chizuru. You're mine, you get that?" he said strictly. She noticed that his pale cheeks seem to have a hint of a blush, either from the heat or from saying those words to her.

She nodded with a giggle. "Yes sir!" she replied chirpily.

"I'd have to get going. I have to meet Kondo-san in an official's house just around the area. Go back to the temple immediately" he turned to leave with a small contented smile on his lips.

She nodded and walked a couple of steps behind him. Upon reaching the road they went their separate ways.

* * *

><p>Note:_ The cranes... I don't know if there is origami that time but I was writing on paper the day before I wrote this chapter and I ended up using that paper for origami *instead of throwing it into the trash* hence the idea for the letter hahahaha Also all this time, as i was writing this, I never once imagined Chizuru wearing the pink kimono and white hakama she wore in the series (the colors gave her gender off) but to point that out I decided to give her a new set of clothes in the story hahaha blue and black seems manly. *I'm just blabberin' here hahaha never mind me*. And yeah Kazama... I don't dislike him but I like the competitive air between him and Toshi so yeah..._

8. Crucial Masquerade

****Crucial Masquerade****

"So this is the new headquarters, eh? Not bad" Shinpachi said as he looked around after putting down a case containing some of his personal items.

"I agree. This is much bigger than our last headquarters" Heisuke nudged him as he went on to the main hall.

"Heisuke" Okita hissed as he saw Heisuke approaching.

"Got nothing to do?" Heisuke dropped his things on the ground and sat next to Okita who was sitting on the steps without a care in the world, an irony of the scene around him, drying his hair with the help of the midday heat and the whistling wind.

A smirk appeared on Okita's lips. "I'm sick, so I let them do the work for me" he chuckled.

"Unfair!" Heisuke exclaimed. "Come on! How long are you gonna pretend to be sick. I know you just feel like slacking off!"

Okita laughed. "Then why don't you pretend with me then?"

"Sorry but I don't want to get spanked by you know who." Heisuke said with a wink and the two of them laughed in unison.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

"Tousen-dono" Chizuru bowed her head then smiled at one of the elder monks. "Thanks for these change of clothes. I could really use them"

"Not a problem. They are just a couple of things left by those who move on to train in another temple." The old man said with a smile. "Hojo and Saionji suggested that you use the bathroom behind the building we're currently occupying. Given your situation we couldn't allow you to fall victim to men's weak calls from the flesh." The monks sighed "You know, Yukimura, since you no longer have any relatives that you know of, if you really need a place to stay we can send you away to a safer place. Kyoto is unstable at the moment and as you see the temple acquired tenants. You might find it hard if you insist on staying here"

Chizuru ducked her head a bit with a faint smile. "Thank you very much for everything you've done for me but I can't see myself anywhere else at the moment. Please allow me to stay here"

"Of course. It is not a problem if you stay here, you've helped us a lot in chores but now Yukimura, are you sure you don't mind?"

She nodded her head. "Besides, Hojo-dono might crave for my porridge and Miso soup" she giggled and the monk did as well.

"Well. I understand." The old man stood up.

Chizuru bowed. "Thank you for keeping my identity as well"

"Not a problem. Besides with the way things are, it's better if you are presented as a boy" the monk said then left the room.

Chizuru sat up then reached for her futon and unrolled it. She lay supine with her feet on top of her pillow which was on top of her clothes, keeping her feet elevated. "I feel quite lucky that this started yesterday. Now I have a legit reason to stay here. On the other hand it would be hard to wash the stained cloth and I could

really use a good warm bath now"\_ she patted her lower abdomen which felt a bit cramped due to her red day. \_"This should end in a few days though"\_

~~~o~~~o~~~o~~~

"I'd be heading to my quarters now. You should do the same." Saitou placed his cup down, next to the jar of _sake_. "For a hot day, it sure is a cold night." He stopped as Okita started coughing then continued when he finished. "It won't do your health any good if you stay out in the cold"

Okita smirked and finished the contents of his cup. "Aren't you a bit too worried about me?" when there was no reply he chuckled. "Alright. Alright. I'd be going. I'd just enjoy the moon for a bit longer" he said as he made a gesture to shoo Saitou away. With that Saitou was on his way.

_"_Everyone's too worried. It's just a little cold!"_ he started coughing again, this time a bit more violently. As he stopped he covered his eyes with a hand for a while because the coughing made his head throb. _"What a nuisance!"_ he thought as he poured himself another cup. Just as he was about to take a swig he felt an incoming hurried movement just on the pathway lined with bushes to his right. Despite the dimness of the surroundings, his eyes caught those of another in a short distance.

"Nee!" he called out as he stood up, with his _katana_ in hand, and took a couple of steps towards the pathway. He noticed that the person seemed to be surprised and backed off. "What are you doing sneaking around here?" He reached for the hilt of his _katana_. "I don't seem to have seen your face around here. A spy probably?"

"Ah!" came the surprised voice from the frail looking young man, who held a lantern and a bunch of folded clothes under his arm. "I'm not a spy! I'm an errand boy"

Souji smiled and pulled out his _katana_. "I don't remember us hiring one and why would the monks need an errand boy?" he took another step closer and with the light from the lantern the boy was holding he got a clearer view of his face. For a moment he doubted that he was talking to a boy for the young man in front of him had a delicate, sweet looking face. "It seems like you're in a hurry. Why don't you tell me about the errand you have to run at this time?"

"I'm on my way to the area inhabited by the monks. I was taken in by them! I swear I'm no spy! so please!"

Okita pointed his sword at the boy, just a couple of inches from his cheek but moved it away when someone quickly approached them.

"Souji!" Heisuke said in surprise as he stopped and took in the scene in front of him. "You, who are you?" he said with a small growl as he turned to the unknown person in front of him.

"Ah!" I'm the monks' errand boy" came the reply with a nervous bow.

"Eh?! I haven't seen you!" Heisuke was interrupted by a unison of gasp.

"Yukimura!" exclaimed one of the apprentice monks who ran to Chizuru. He shot a glance at both Heisuke and Okita.

"Please. There is no need to resort to violence." said another one who popped next to Heisuke.

Okita laughed and sheathed his sword. "Well, I guess I got excited over nothing" he turned but stopped to cough for a bit then continued on.

"Yukimura, are you alright?" said another one who went next to Chizuru.

Chizuru nodded with a small smile. "It was nothing"

Heisuke, with his hands clasped behind his head, observed the boy in front of him. "His face looks too feminine for a boy. Hhhmmmm" well I guess there are men born to play lead roles in a big shot Kabuki play" he thought then sighed.

"I'm Toudou Heisuke." he introduced himself with a smile and the group in front of him ducked their head. "and you're?"

"Yukimura" Chizuru replied hesitantly.

"Anyway sorry for the scare but you're lucky I got here on time or else Souji might have already cut you down" he laughed jokingly and stopped as he saw the frightened expression on the groups face. "Anyway, it's nice meeting you. See yah!" he said then skipped over the bushes and ran towards the same direction Okita went.

"I really thought I was done for" Chizuru sighed exhaustedly.

~~~~~

It's been three days since the Shinsengumi moved in the temple but Chizuru still had not seen Hijikata even once. She stayed inside her quarters most of the day, half afraid that the incident from the other night to happen again.

Chizuru sighed and fell back on her futon then gazed at the kodachi which was given to her by Hijikata that night she escaped from the brothel. "Will I ever get to use that? I hope not" another sigh escaped her lips and she turned on her side. "What's he doing now? I really" \_

Her thoughts were interrupted with the quick sliding open and closing of her door. She sat up and looked at the man she was longing to see all this time with a heartfelt smile.

"Sneaking around really is a pain" he groaned then sat down looking a bit irritated.

Chizuru laughed then got out of her futon and sat across him. "How are things going?"

"Not so good" he sighed exhaustedly. "And you? Okita told me that he mistaken the monks' errand boy for a spy. On an instant I knew it was you. That got me a bit worried" he paused. "I see that you're fine so that's a relief. Anyway work with Yamazaki tomorrow. Yamazaki has been the guy delivering my messages to you."

"The ninja?" she muttered.

"He'd be in the storage house just behind our quarters in midday. He'd be arranging some records, so help him out. He's the only other person who knows about the whole thing so it's best if you work with him first"

She nodded eagerly. "Alright. Is that all?"

In reply a small smile played on Hijikata's lips as he slithered next to her, sliding his arm around her waist. He inched his face closer to hers and brushed his lips on her cheek. "That's all for tomorrow" he whispered in her ear, making her shiver a bit. "But tonight I have more things in mind" he kissed her ear as his hand started to pull away her \_kimono\_.

Chizuru held his hand to stop him and looked at him blushing a bit. "Not tonight" she pecked a kiss on his gaped lips. "It's that time of the month"

He let out a defeated sigh and held her tightly. "Alright" another sigh escaped his lips. "Anyway, there are more people around now so we can't just do as we please right?" he said knowing that if someone sees him going into or out her room it would raise suspicions about the identity of the person staying in the room. He know they should be careful. He can't just let his carnal desires get the best of him but as a man still in his prime sometimes even a good self-discipline won't work at times.

"Would you like me to sing for you instead?" she said softly as she rested her head on his chest.

"Someone might hear"

"The crickets are singing loudly tonight" she giggled. "I'll sing softly so that only you can hear" After seeing him smile at her, she closed her eyes and started singing.

He looked down at her as she sang, feeling flustered with how beautiful the creature in his arms was. He remembered the first time he laid eyes on her, the awe he felt and that quickening of his heartbeat as their skin touched for the first time. She was still as beautiful as she was then but it wasn't only her beauty that caught his heart. It was the warmth in her smile despite her situation at that time, her eyes which told him a lot without her having to speak and her voice which he longed to be called with.

After the song she smiled at him and in reply he planted a kiss on her lips. "I should probably go now" he said letting her loose.

"Probably, good night then" she replied as she sat up.

"Don't forget about tomorrow" he reminded before leaving her room.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Note: <strong>\_Keeping my feet elevated on my red says sure helps me ease the cramps. I was confused with what honorific to use with the monks...so I just used dono...they add -bou but I'm not sure how to use it so I just used -dono. \_

## 9. Yukimura's Debut

\*\*Yukimura's Debut \*\*

"Good morning" she ducked her head upon seeing Yamazaki who was just about to enter the storage house.

"Oh, Yukimura" Yamazaki replied and looked at her from head to toe, still a bit surprised at her transformation from the first time he met her. "Just in time" he opened the doors and went in. "I'd be organizing some records which they obviously just stuffed here" he looked a bit tired already upon seeing how disorganized the room was. "Actually I'm looking for a certain set of records. They are medical records and a list of men who joined us last spring"

"Alright. I suggest we start by removing those which probably contains documents then organize the things there before looking for the records" Chizuru suggested as she stepped into the storage room.

"I guess that would be best. We won't be able to find anything in this mess"

They immediately started with the job. After a while a couple of members saw them and helped out with carrying the heavy stuff. Before sunset, the storage room was fixed with the help of other members who volunteered to help. They were able to retrieve a dozen of drawers and chests containing records and other documents. Yamazaki ordered the men to help him bring them to his quarters.

"We just have to go through these" Yamazaki turned to Chizuru as the man laid down the last item and left his room.

"Alright" she replied enthusiastically. She went to the nearest drawer and started removing its contents. Yamazaki also started rummaging on a wooden chest next to her.

"We should really start putting labels at these things" Yamazaki uttered to himself as he wiped away dust from the stack of paper in his hand.

Chizuru glanced at him with a smile. "It's nice of you to volunteer to do the storage cleaning"

"I really wouldn't volunteer for that. It's just that I'm also a medic and documents on treatments are important to me. I also have to check on our recruitment for some other matter. These boxes containing documents were probably placed in the storage because no one bothered to check what's inside and didn't know where to put these when we moved headquarters" he explained.

"These looks like medical records" she turned to him.

"They are" he took them and scanned them then placed it beside him. "Thanks" There was a while of silence as they continued retrieving the documents they needed. "Yukimura, so how are you adapting to the place so far?" he inquired, breaking the silence.

"I haven't been out my room this long since you guys moved here but I'll survive" she replied.

"I see."

The two of them stopped what they were doing as they heard footsteps approaching the room.

"What are you doing? Kondo-san brought home snacks better get there now or you'll eat dust" Shinpachi peeked at the room then his gaze stuck at Chizuru whose eyes meet with his. "Who's the new kid?"

"Nagakura-san, this is Yukimura." Yamazaki introduced Chizuru who ducked her head and continued with what she was doing. "He's the monks' errand boy but we could really use his help around here"

"Eh?!" Heisuke popped from behind Shinpachi and then entered the room. "Yukimura. You're the guy from the other night" Chizuru just nodded in reply.

"You met him already?" Shinpachi asked entering the room after Heisuke.

Heisuke nodded. "Okita mistaken him for a spy and he almost got his head cut off"

"Is that so?" Shinpachi looked at Chizuru. "Poor thing. He looks too dainty to even be able to lift a sword. Are you sure he's a boy?" he chuckled.

Heisuke went next to Chizuru and patted her back with force, almost making her tumble over. "With proper training and some food he's look as sturdy as me in no time"

Shinpachi laughed. "Call yourself sturdy once you get these babies" he said flexing his arm muscles then stood up. "Just go and get your share. I don't want mine to be swiped away. See you" Shinpachi left with a grin.

Heisuke came running after him. "You've already got your share! Oi! Wait"

Chizuru sighed, feeling at ease now that they were gone. "They're a lively pair"

"Yukimura, it must be hard pretending as a boy" Yamazaki glanced at her.

She nodded. "But I decided on this so I have to keep it up"

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Chizuru felt like her heart was in her throat as she stopped in front of the dining area's door. She cleared her throat before excusing herself in the manliest voice she can manage. As she slid open the door, she was welcomed by stares from the men sitting in a circle inside. She entered with the tray of hot tea, trying to avoid their eyes.

"So how are you doing errand boy?" Chizuru heard the familiar voice and turned to its source and was greeted by a smirk. "You haven't forgotten about me, have you?" Okita added.

"Oi! Oi! Souji, you're scaring him" Heisuke interrupted then turned to Chizuru. "Anyway, why are you serving our tea Yukimura?"

"Hey you're the one working with Yamazaki the other day right?" Shinpachi took the tea from Chizuru.

"I've seen you running around the place doing this and that but I didn't know that you were already acquainted with them" Sano said crossing his arms.

The door slid open before Chizuru can speak. She turned to the direction of the door and was somehow relieved to see Hijikata standing there with the commander, Kondo-san, and a man she still doesn't know behind him.

"So how did it go?" Okita inquired.

"It was the same as always but they'd need our help at one point or another they're just putting on airs at the moment." Hijikata replied as he sat down, trying to act like he didn't notice Chizuru's presence at all.

"Wouldn't that give us problems in the future?" Saitou finally spoke and it was the only time that Chizuru noticed his presence.

"_He was the guy from that night_" she remembered him from when she went to the doctor's house in town. She retreated to the side of the room with her tray.

"I hope not" Hijikata replied. "You there" he darted a cold glare at Chizuru who sat up attentively. "Get us some tea"

"Yes" she replied and left the room quickly.

"You know the kid?" Shinpachi inquired.

Hijikata nodded. "He's been running errands around here"

"Yukimura was taken in by the monks but it seems like he doesn't mind lending us a hand" Kondo added.

"Is he a new recruit?" Saitou inquired.

"No. Just an errand boy" Hijikata replied.

"He's got quite a pretty face for a boy" Sano said with a small smile. "Actually I feel like I've seen him before"

"I thought you only remember women" Shinpachi teased him with a nudge.

"Of course not anyway I must be mistaken, never mind." Sano replied then he started some small talk with his friend about a nice new place to grab some drinks. Heisuke butted in, not wanting to get left behind.

Moments later Chizuru came back with the tea and served them. After doing so she fled to the corner of the room, waiting for instructions.

"You can leave now" Hijikata commanded. Chizuru ducked her head and quickly left the room. As she did, she felt eyes on her back. Well she can't blame them, she was new and it wouldn't hurt on their end to be suspicious. It was a short but stressful encounter. She smiled at herself nonetheless for doing a job well done.

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"Tsk. I lost again" Heisuke sheathed his sword and scratched his head.

"Don't worry you might get me next time" Okita chuckled. He turned to Saitou who was practicing on his own. "Would you like to go at it?"

Saitou retained his stance and glanced at Okita with a faint smile. "I'll pass"

"Are you sure?" he said then noticed the errand boy watching them attentively. "Hey you! Come down here" he called.

Chizuru sat up and pointed at herself, unsure if it was really her he was calling.

"Who else?" he placed a hand on his waist and watched as the errand boy approached. "You enjoyed watching that you didn't even noticed that you're drooling" Okita teased as soon as Chizuru stopped in front of him, a bit tensed.

"EH?!" Chizuru wiped her lips with her sleeves and furrowed her brows upon realizing that he was just making fun of her.

"You seem interested with what we're doing. Haven't seen someone spar before?" he asked.

"I have but it wasn't as intense as your fight" she replied looking away from his eyes which seem to dig through her

"Is that so?" he said tilting his head a bit, observing her keenly. He handed her a wooden sword which was lying nearby. "Here. You should try it if you're interested"

"No! I'm reallyâ€¦". Chizuru held out the sword back to Okita.

"A couple of swings won't hurt" he smiled, pushing back the sword to her.

Chizuru wasn't sure what to make of his smile. It wasn't a friendly smile at all. \_"I'm supposed to be a man now. A man doesn't chicken out on these things"\_ She gripped the hilt tightly. "Alright" she finally agreed.

"Woah! So you're ready to show us your stuff. Eh? Yukimura" Heisuke grinned.

Chizuru shook her head. "No! I'm not good at this at all"

"So you have knowledge on how to use a sword" Okita picked up another wooden sword and whipped it on the open space beside him, making a cutting sound in the air.

"Just a bitâ€|but I practiced with a short sword before" she replied as she positioned herself in a stance which she wasn't even sure was right.

Okita smirked. "I see"

"Soujiâ€|" Saitou called his attention with his soothingly calm voice.

Okita glanced at him. "Don't worry I know. I won't hurt the kid" as he said that his eyes narrowed at Chizuru who was trying not to tremble. She really didn't expect that she'd end up having to spar with one of the best in the group.

"Anytime you're ready" he taunted her a bit by not even going on either a defensive or offensive stance.

Chizuru noticed this and felt like he was really looking down at her. "Alright" she replied, then charged at him with all she's got. Okita blocked her attack without effort and pushed her back, giving her another chance. She attacked once more but this time the wooden sword flew from her hands without her even knowing it. Her jaw dropped and her eyes met Okita's judging eyes. The tip of the wooden sword was gently resting below her chin. She moved back and so did he, dropping the wooden sword casually on the ground.

"Yukimura" Heisuke rushed to Chizuru and slapped her back. "You weren't that bad. You were up against Souji so you were really bound to lose" he laughed.

\_"\_And that's supposed to make me feel better?"\_ she thought as she smiled at him. "Thank you forâ€|" she ducked her head.

"It's nothing" Okita interrupted as he walked towards Saitou. "Well, Yukimura" he said with an emphasis on her name. "Don't you have anything else you need to do?" he asked glancing back at her.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, remembering that she promised to cook lunch for the elder monks. "Excuse me!" she ducked her head and rushed off.

"Souji, I'd go grab some drink" Heisuke said as he rushed off the other way without waiting for a reply.

Saitou sheathed his sword and started gathering the bunch of hay

sliced in half which he used for practicing. "You're going on patrol tonight?" he glanced at Souji who didn't even bother to help him out.

"No. Hijikata's too worried to even let me out. Tch. It's not like I'd die from a cold."

"Actually, you can die from a cold"

"I'm going to die from boredom before dying from a cold" Okita replied then a mischievous smile formed on his lips. "But things just got interesting" he muttered to himself and walked off.

## 10. Probability for the rain to fall

**\*\*Probability for rain to fall\*\***

"And you expect me to allow that?" Hijikata raised a brow at Chizuru who was standing before him with the short sword he gave her in hand.

"Well, I'd really want to be your attendant but I'm not even that good at using a sword." She looked at him with conviction. "I mean the demon vice commander can't have a weak assistant, right?"

"Tch. And where did you hear that demon thing?" he said crossing his arms.

Chizuru held back a chuckle, since they were talking seriously.  
"Everyone knows it"

"That aside, I can't say yes to that request" he looked at her with a stern face.

"But I don't want to be a burden to you~|.I " she looked down, clenching the hilt of the short sword tighter.

"Shut it" he scowled. "If you see yourself as a burden then feel free to think that way." He turned his back to her and started walking away. Chizuru wanted to say more but with how he looked she knew that the conversation was over.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Kazama crossed his arms and looked at the men in front of him sharply. "Enough of that rubbish. I'm supporting your clan because it benefits me. It's up to you how you win your battles and eliminate your problems."

"Kazama-sama" muttered one of the men, bowing down. "I'm sorry to waste your time. We'd be leaving then. Thank you for everything"

"Good" he looked down his tea which was already cold. "and I really didn't want this one to go to waste" he uttered to himself and pushed the tea aside. He watched as the men left the room, all of them saying their thanks to them. As soon as the last man left, he stood up and sat on the window. He fished his pipe out, lighted it and started smoking._ "There's probably something better for me to do. I

couldn't care less who wins the war. All I can do is provide them weapons and watch if they'd be able to pave away to the future they see fit" _he thought as he looked out the horizon.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Chizuru sat up as she heard the knocking on her door. She was sure it was still early and she didn't feel like getting up but upon hearing the voice from outside the door she forgot her sleepiness.

"Yukiâ€|. " Hijikata called for the third time and the door slid open before he can even finish. He looked down at Chizuru who was still in her night clothes.

"Hijikata" she beamed with excitement. Since the small argument they had yesterday he was giving her a cold shoulder, so she was glad to see him there.

"Tch." He placed a hand on the door and slid it close, surprising Chizuru. "Go and get dressed."

Chizuru blushed and realized that she wasn't dressed properly. Quickly she put on her clothes and tried to make herself not look like someone who just got out of bed. "Sorry" she muttered as she opened the door once more. He was waiting outside with his arms crossed and a straight face.

"Go get your short sword" he commanded and without questions asked Chizuru followed. "Come with me" he said then started walking off.

Chizuru followed closely behind. "Where are we going?"

"You wanted to learn how to defend yourself, right?" he said as they turned a corner and headed for the open area near the captains quarters where Saitou was practicing drawing his sword.

"Hijikata-san" Saitou sheathed his sword and acknowledged Hijikata's presence.

Hijikata pushed Chizuru forward. "Teach him what you can."

"I'll try" Saitou replied.

Chizuru looked back at Hijikata who started to walk away then looked at Saitou who was waiting for her to come closer. She strode to where Saitou was and ducked her head. "Ahâ€|Please teach me Saitou-san. I'll do my best"

"Draw your sword" he said without further ado.

"Yes." She drew her sword and held it with both hands.

Saitou started the lesson by teaching her the proper posture and stance. After doing so he asked her to swing her sword in the way she knows how. He saw several flaws with how she did it and so he moved behind her and held out his hand, holding her hand firmly and guided

her as she swings her sword.

"That's better. Now do it ten times with the foot work" he said as he stepped back. \_"So my hunch was right"\_ he thought as he keenly watched her.

They continued with the basics for another half hour and then Saitou ended the session.

"Thank you very much" Chizuru bowed after sheathing her sword.

"It was nothing. I was told that you wanted to learn how to defend yourself because of your constant mishap. Now I understand why you watched Okita and Toudou as they spar too eagerly" Saitou replied in almost a monotone.

\_"\_\_So Hijikata gave him that lie about me losing my family, getting robbed and so on"\_ she thought and can't help but smile. She nodded at Saitou. "I want to be able to defend myself somehow"

"Always carry your sword then" Saitou caught her gaze. "What is a man without his sword anyway" he said then left without another word.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Closing his notebook after writing down a _haiku, _Hijikata stood up and opened the window. The nights are already turning chilly and winter was just a stone throw away. Crossing his arms, he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Slowly he opened his eyes, leaned on the windowsill and stared at the sky which suffered from the absence of its small sparkling lights but was covered by thin mist of clouds instead.

_"__It's probably going to rain"_ he thought as he got a whiff of the wind. A memory of a rainy night months ago flashed in his mind. He remembered how he strode down the streets without a care in the world, hoping that he gets to his destination before the first drops of rain fell, so that he could be with her. Thinking back, he realized how much he allowed his emotions to take over him but he doesn't resent one bit of the decisions he made related to her.

"Chizuru" he muttered her name softly, remembering how it tasted in his lips the first time her name touched his lips. He frowned and sighed. As if on cue he could hear marching drops of water falling and roaring in the distance. Soon enough it started pouring right outside his window as well. He took a step back from the window and closed it. _"She's so near but I can't even see her as I please"_ he thought feeling frustrated with the space they had to build between them in order to hide their secret.

His thoughts were then interrupted by footsteps just outside his room. He turned to his door as the person outside stopped.

"Hijikata-san" came the voice in its usual calm manner.

"Saitou" he muttered.

"I hope I'm not bothering you but can I speak to you for a moment"

"Sure. Come in" Hijikata sat down, waiting for his guest to enter and settle down.

Saitou closed the door and sat across him. "I was planning to inquire about this tomorrow but I saw you just closed your window. Forgive me. This is nothing important, I guess"

Hijikata gave him a small smile. "It's alright. Besides if it's you who requires a moment to talk about something it means that it's important so don't hold back"

Saitou nodded and thought for a while how to put his thoughts into words. "Hijikata-san, are you aware that Yukimura is a woman?" he was about to say more after the question but he noticed the change in Hijikata's expression, giving him the answer he was looking for. "It's not that it's beneficial to us but I can't help but wonder why she has to keep her identity. It actually makes me suspicious of her"

Hijikata just stared back at Saitou, keeping his composure the best he could. He knew that they'd find out eventually, he's even got his explanation prepared but he was still caught off guard. He cleared his throat then sighed. "Yes. Yukimura is a woman" he replied.

"I see. I was suspicious of her motives, like Souji I thought that maybe she's a spy but her skills are just below someone who would qualify as one. Besides I remember her from that night months ago. A boy resembling her was with you but now that I think about it I believe it was her then"

"__This is even worst. Now he might think we knew each other well before__" Hijikata nodded and crossed his arms. "Yes. She was that same person. I ran into her when I visited the temple to talk with the monks and helped her that night. I never asked for her reason then, it was none of my concern. I should've told you"

"It's alright. As you said she's ran into trouble. Travelling as a woman would be dangerous." Saitou paused. "It really doesn't concern us much. Besides I personally think that keeping her faÃ§ade as a boy would be just fine"

"I thought the same when I found out about it. Staying here as a woman might cause some ruckus so I decided and suggested that she stay as a boy"

"It must've been hard for her"

"It is"

"But should we allow her to continue helping around?"

"What do you think?"

"Personally I don't mind. Besides she has been taking orders from you. I think that you did great to assign her to work around us only Hijikata-san. I mean, mingling with other members might jeopardize her secret as well as her safety. Also she isn't involved in our

affairs so I guess that's fine"

"Right. Saitou, for now please don't tell anyone. They might know but I'd want to tell them myself." Hijikata sighed. "I'm sure Kondo-san would be surprised."

"He would be."

"Is that all?"

"Yes" Saitou ducked his head. "I'd be taking my leave now. You'd be departing for Nara at dawn. Please rest well, Hijikata-san" he said politely as usual.

Hijikata nodded. "Please take care of things while I'm gone. We'd be back by dinner but you'd never know what might happen, so I'm counting on you"

"Of course" Saitou replied as he stood up bowed and left the room.

Hijikata fell back the tatami covered floor with a thud and sighed exhaustedly. He started massaging the bridge of his nose. Others must've realized it by now but he was relieved that Saitou was one of them if that's the case. Saitou understands things in different perspectives and he's not one to judge someone easily. Somehow Hijikata feels guilty for telling him a lie about Chizuru's story of how she ended up in the temple but he comforted his conscience by thinking that everything else was true, she lost her dad and tripped into series of unfortunate events. The only lie was that he left out the part about them being lovers and her being from the red light district but it was a necessary lie.

He suddenly sat up as he remembered something. _"Now that I think about it, Sano and Shinpachi were the ones who picked her out that nightâ€|. But they don't seem to remember her one bit"_ he growled getting irritated with how stressful things are. _"Sano did say that she looks familiarâ€|."_ A thought popped in his mind. "Tch. Of course nothing like that happened" he mumbled. _"If they did have aâ€|.aâ€|wellâ€| an encounter before I'm sure Chizuru would've told me."_ He groaned, stood up and pulled out his futon. "Crap!" he rolled it out, grabbed his pillow and blanket. "I'm going to sleep" his brows furrowed as he lay down and forced his eyes shut.

_"__It doesn't matter how many men she's been with before. It's not like she wanted to be with them anyway. She's mine now and no one else would have her other than me. Also she told me that I'm â€|"_ he felt his cheeks burn at the thought of her words. _"Her first loveâ€|"_ he turned to his side and pulled the blanket over his shoulders. "Tsk! Damn it! I'm a grown man and I still get flustered by this nonsense" he mumbled to himself with an irritated sigh. He tossed and turned for a while before finally finding a comfortable position before dozing off.

* * *

><p>Note: _We all have our monologue moments and I had one before writing this chapter hence the last scene... hihi...

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11. Snowflakes at dawn

****Snowflakes at dawn****

"Wow! I never thought I'd get to eat something this good tonight" Heisuke said as he chomped down on his food.

"Thanks Yukimura! You can always cook our food from now on, alright?" Shinpachi said with a grin then he pulled Heisuke's bowl of soup and licked it dry.

"OI!" Heisuke jumped up and grabbed his bowl, as usual a fight over the food started.

Chizuru who remained on the corner of the room giggled as she watched them. She didn't expect that it would be fun to be around them somehow but something or rather someone was making her uncomfortable at the moment. She glanced at Okita who was obviously observing her. As their eyes met he gave her that double edged smile of him. There was a sudden jolt of nervousness in her and so she turned away from him. She ducked her head and was about to excuse herself when Okita called her attention.

"Yes" she looked at him, keeping her composure.

"What's the hurry? You can stay and eat here if you like" he said, putting down his bowl. "Actually we've just ran out of something to talk about" he crossed his arms. "How about you tell us about yourself, Yukimura. Just to keep the ball rolling"

Saitou casted a quick glance at Okita then at Chizuru. He had an idea where the conversation was going. He noticed that Heisuke and Shinpachi shut their trap, curious with what's the serious conversation was about in their side of the circle.

"Now that's interesting" Sano stopped eating and turned to them. "How'd you got the position as errand boy here anyway?" he said with a sly smile.

"__Is it just me or is the cat out of the box already?"_ Chizuru scratched her head and smiled at them. "Well it's not much of a storyâ€¦ I mean how I got here and all"

"Hhmmm. Really?" Okita was obviously enjoying the interrogation.

"It's something I'd rather not speak about butâ€¦" she had the whole explanation in her head.

Saitou interrupted. "Let's respect his privacy. His story is his to keep, if that's what he please"

"Eh? Don't be such a kill joy. This is just a little getting to know" Souji said with a chuckle. "Unless you know something that we don't" he looked at Chizuru with judging and accusing eyes. His lips curled as if to taunt her.

"Soujiâ€¦" Heisuke turned to Okita finally realizing that something's up.

"Would you care to tell us about that little secret of yours, Yukimura?" Souji said teasingly.

"Secret? I don't have any." She replied keeping her cool but she was sweating under her sleeve.

"Really? Then tell me all about you pretending to be a man when in fact you're a woman" Okita said with a serious face.

Shinpachi almost spitted the tea he just drank in surprise. "WHAT?! Yukimura is a woman?!" he pointed at her.

"I knew it. I'd always know a woman when I see one" Sano said scratching his chin knowingly with a smile. "Well, I don't really care for your gender but I want to know your motives for pretending to be a man. Is it just a coincidence that someone pretending to be a man lived in a temple where the headquarters was getting moved? And now she's offering her services to us running errands and all"

"Suspicious eh?" Okita added.

"Yukimura" Hiesuke muttered looking at her a bit disheartened with her secret.

Saitou cleared his throat gaining everyone's attention. "I know you guys think that she's a spy but she doesn't have the skill to be one"

"She might not be good with the sword but sending someone weak lessens suspicion" Okita replied. "They even send kids to do the job you know"

Sano grinned. "Besides a female spy doesn't have to be that good with the sword to gain information if she's a master in bed."

"I don't have any ulterior motives for helping out." Chizuru finally blurted out in her normal feminine voice. No point in pretending, now that the chicken is out of its coop. "Please just hear me out, there's a reason why I'm here pretending as a boy" she stood up with her fist clenched, feeling frustrated.

Saitou noticed that Okita and Sano would probably push her further into the corner. He sighed. "I knew that she was a girl and I know the reason why he's presented himself as a boy. Hijikata knows too." He spoke in hopes to get her out of hot waters.

The door suddenly slid open. "What do I know too?" Hijikata appeared with a furrowed brow. Seeing Chizuru standing looking upset and the look on everyone else's face he instantly knew what was happening. "What's the fuss all about? I can hear your voices from down the hall" he entered, Kondo-san, Sannan and Inoue followed him and they sat at their usual spot.

"Are you guys bullying Yukimura?" Kondo asked, knowing that the guys can be mean sometimes especially to a frail looking kid like him.

"No we were just trying to find out why Yukimura is pretending to be

a boy, that's all" Souji replied.

"Huh? A what?!" Kondo looked at Chizuru.

Chizuru just wanted to run to Hijikata and hide behind him, to keep her from the confused and judging stares but she sucked it up. She ducked her head. "I'm sorry. He's right. I'm a woman"

"You are?" Kondo looked at Hijikata who just nodded.

"I'm sorry. I was going to tell you but it was something so trivial I forgot about it" Hijikata replied crossing his arms.

"We still have to hear what she has to say though" Okita said looking back at Chizuru.

Chizuru gave them a deep bow. "I'm sorry everyone. I was the one who asked not to reveal my identity. The monks took me in knowing that I'm actually a girl." She looked at everyone who was attentively listening to her. A quick glance at Hijikata and she noticed the creases in between his brows as he pinched the bridge of his nose. "I was originally from Edo. I lost my family and came to Kyoto to look for my father but he's probably dead now" she paused as she mentioned her father.

"I had to pretend as a boy to make travelling more convenient and safe. I tried my luck looking for my father here but just a couple of days here and I ran into some robbers who took all of my money. I had no other place to go so I went to this temple, hid and slept in the shrine for nights. They found me and took me in since I've got nowhere else to go. I became their errand boy soon after." She looked down with a frown. "My troubles led me here and nothing else."

"So that's whyâ€|" Kondo looked at her with pity. "Yukimura" he called her and smiled when she looked up to him. "It's alright. You lied but I understand why you did so. It must've been pretty hard on you."

"That's it? So we just let her stay?" Sannan inquired.

"Well we can't just kick her out from the temple. She came here before we were even here and she's got no place to go" Kondo crossed his arms in deep thought. "Hijikata, you knew all along?" he received a nod and an exhausted sigh in reply. "Well what should we do?"

He knew the answer but he can't appear to be all on her side. He ran a quick look around the room and everyone was waiting for an answer. There was silence.

Heisuke then scrambled forward and raised his hand. "Iâ€|" he opened his mouth and everyone turned to him. "I think it's just fine if we let her stay. I mean she's been around us for a while now and it didn't seem to be a problem"

"He's got a point. Besides I won't feel that good if we threw out a woman who's no longer got anywhere else to go. She isn't interfering with our affairs so I don't really mind if she stays" Shinpachi supported Heisuke.

"Saitou, do you have anything you want to say?" Kondo glanced at the

man who just listened with a straight face.

"As long as she doesn't meddle in our affairs I couldn't care less if she stays or go. I suggest that she keep up the act as a boy though." Saitou replied simply then sipped his tea which has already turned cold.

Chizuru looked around once more and decided to speak up. She ducked her head. "Please. Allow me to stay. I really have nowhere else to go"

Kondo sighed. "Of course I won't kick you out." He gave her an encouraging smile and continued. "You can continue helping out around here as well, I don't mind. You've been making really good food and tea and Hijikata seems to trust you. You can stay, Yukimura"

"Ah!" She beamed at him. "Thank you very much" she ducked her head once more. "Thank you"

"If that's the case then please leave us now. We've got things to discuss" Hijikata said rather coldly.

"Yes" she ducked her head and quickly disappeared from the room.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

"What are you doing out here?" Hijikata inquired upon spotting Chizuru curled up on the stairs in deep thought.

"Nothing" she replied weakly without even looking up at him.

The sun hasn't even risen yet and dawn was always the coldest at this time of year. Hijikata sighed. He was sure that no one was around so he stood closer to her. "You did well back there."

"I'm sorry. I caused you trouble."

"Tsk. I told you I handled it already so stop mopping around"

She looked up at him. "Sorry" she then gave him a smile.

Upon seeing her smile he looked away. "Jeez. Don't give me that look"

"Eh? What look?"

"Nothing" he crossed his arms.

"Things are getting more turbulent here in the capital" she stood up and turned to him. "Please take care of yourself"

"I will"

"I better get going. Someone might get up early and see us"

He placed a hand on her head. She looked up at him and caught that smile she rarely sees lately. "Go get some more sleep. You might still grow up"



"Even hibernating won't help me gain an inch"

He removed his hand from her head. "Don't worry. They may seem scary but they're a good bunch" he leaned down and placed a kiss on her lips. "I'd be back in three days"

She felt her cheeks heat up. "Alright" she nodded.

He moved away from her and started to walk back to his room. She watched him disappear from her sight before returning to her room as well.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Hijikata have returned from his trip and Chizuru was sitting outside the steps of her room waiting for him. She was looking at the ground which had patches of snow here and there. She rubbed her hands together and clasped them. It was still dark and the sun won't appear till the next couple of hours. Suddenly something fell on her shoulders and familiar hands rested on them.

"We should really pick a better time to see each other." Hijikata said softly as he leaned down, his face next to hers.

She placed a hand on her shoulder and managed to grab a cloth. She pulled it off her back and held it in her hands with an elated expression on her face. "Thank you" you shouldn't have" she nestled the purple haori in her arms.

"I wanted to get something prettier but you still have to dress as a man" he sat down next to her. A faint smile appeared on his lips as he watched her hold his gift dearly. That's how he wanted to see her, free from worries and contented "But would I be able to keep you smiling like that?" he asked himself, knowing how terrible things are getting. He's got a lot on his hands and she might get dragged into chaos. Also they have to jump into action anytime and anything can happen in the midst of battle.

"Is something wrong?" Chizuru noticed how he was staring at her. He looked away and didn't respond. She reached for his hand and held it. His heat was transferring to her. The sudden contact sent bolts of desire throughout her body.

"I'm just thinking" he looked at her.

"About what" she moved herself closer to him.

Instead of a reply he got up and scooped her in his arms. Chizuru gasped and held tightly unto his sleeve in surprise. Quickly he got into her room, shutting the door firmly behind them. She placed an arm around his neck as he knelt to put her down the futon and started kissing him. It's been a while since they got this intimate and their urges are bursting.

His hands, which masterfully taken her clothes off, caressed her skin as he pulled her closer to him, making her body forget how cold it was outside. Sitting on his lap, she started trailing kisses in his shoulder then hid her face in the crook of his neck as he started fondling her mounds. She sat up then sat astride on his lap. She pulled the collar of his kimono off his shoulder with her teeth,

leaving her hands busy removing his hakama. She shivered as his fingers ran down her backbone then traced a line to her hips which he held, pulling her to him. They paused to look at each other and began to kiss avidly.

He missed every inch of her. The way her skin feels against his, the way she tasted and her soft moans that drives him crazy. He placed both his hands on her bottoms. Lifting herself up on cue, she slowly filled herself with him, making him let out a moan. He felt her nails dig behind his shoulder as she started to move herself with his guidance. She wrapped her legs around his waist and her arms around his neck. They paused to catch their breath and exchanged a kiss as they did so.

She placed a hand on his cheek which he took and kissed. "The sun's coming out soon"

"No, we still have a lot of time" he replied as he slowly laid her down. "I've held back long enough" he muttered with a small groan as he started moving in her once more.

She chuckled. "I know"

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Chizuru opened her eyes and found the space next to her empty. It was already morning, that short while for burning passion was over. It wasn't that long but the time they just spent together compensated for their longing. She stroked the empty side of her futon and she can still feel the heat from his body in it. She closed her eyes and remembered the man who laid there next to her and smiled. She rolled to her side and reached for the purple haori. She sat up and wore it over her bare body, making her feel like she was still wrapped around his arms.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Note: <strong>If you've read this far, THANKS A BUNCH! Please do leave a review, it would be well appreciated :)) This is it for now... I've posted a number of chapter in one go since I'm finished with some of them but I just don't get to post them right away...so yeah :3 Not sure when I'll get to update this but it should be soon, since I've got the next chapters lined up already.

12. Never would be able to forget

\*\*Never would be able to forget\*\*

Chizuru pushed the snow in the yard aside into a small mound of snow that slowly started to melt. It was unexpected to see some rays of sun that day. It has been really cold lately and it just stopped raining snow the night before. As she finished clearing the pathway she placed the hoe she was using back into the small shed and sat down the stairs of the empty building next to where she was staying.

It's been more than two months since her identity as a woman was revealed. At first she really expected everyone to just kick her out from the circle and forget she ever existed but to her surprise it

only took the guys a couple of weeks to get over the issue. In the first week, as she continued with her tasks as she was commanded, the guys watched her. In fact they were observing her quite keenly that it was making her skin tingle. After that getting-used-to period, came the time when they pondered on how they should treat her.

Sano said that they shouldn't make her do too much. Heisuke said that she's just fine continuing what she does. Shinpachi suggested that she should stop wearing men's clothing because she's still at that time when a woman should be looking out for love and she won't attract any looking like a frail boy. Sano reminded his friend that if the other men learn that there is a woman serving the higher-ups there would be a commotion of some sort. Sannan proposed that since she's knowledgeable in medicine she could be a substitute for Yamazaki when he's not around. Okita insisted that she should be kept around them for he doesn't mind something soft in the eyes. The trio laughed at this. Finally, Saitou was just fine with whatever set-up they'll decide on.

She sighed at the memory of that discussion at dinner then remembered something that made her turn bright red. Once while she was cleaning in the kitchen, Okita sneaked behind her and covered her eyes with his hands. He didn't make a sound but after forcing the hand out of her face she didn't expect that it would be him. It was really awkward for her but he just laughed at her reaction.

Right now she was treated like a friend. She would eat with them after serving the food, Heisuke insisted on it. From time to time Saitou would teach her a couple of effective ways and vital points in where she could strike the enemy despite her apparent lack of physical strength. Okita would still tease her when he gets the chance but to her surprise he can get pretty serious too. Sano would casually talk to her when he sees her around and Shinpachi was really like an older brother to her.

She sighed at the thought of how her life turned out to be. Suddenly she remembered a dream she had the night before. She clenched her fists at her lap and bit her lip to stop herself from crying. It seems that the past wouldn't let go of someone that easily. She hasn't said it even to Hijikata but from time to time she was still having nightmares about the days she spent in the brothel. It was awful, even though it was just a dream. It was too vivid that it made her want to run out her room screaming for help.

As the memory flooded her mind, despite her reign over her emotions tears started dropping like melted snow down her paled cheeks.

~~~o~~~o~~~o~~~

Okita just finished practicing and was planning to get something to eat when he spotted Chizuru at the steps of the empty building. Quickly but stealthily, he made his way behind her and covered her eyes with his palms.

"Oraâ€¦" He exclaimed but then he felt Chizuru froze and shiver. He felt something damp in his palms and hurriedly took them off her face. "Oi, is something wrong?" he squatted down next to her. She wasn't moving and it was as if she was having hard time breathing. Going in front of her, he placed both hands in her shoulders and

shook her lightly. Finally, she snapped out of her daydream, or probably nightmare with the look on her face, he concluded.

"O-Okita" she muttered then forced a smile. She realized that her cheeks were damp. She hastily wiped her tears with her sleeves and stood up with an awkward laugh. "I guess everyone's back from their patrolling" "I should go and" she said as she turned to go but he held her by the wrist, interrupting her.

"You know if something weighing down on you, you shouldn't be afraid to speak about it." This is one of those times when Okita was serious and it actually touched her that he cares. "Feigning a smile and a laugh is actually a disgusting thing to do, especially for someone who wears their heart on their sleeve like you"

"Okita" that was all she managed to mutter. "I'm sorry" she looked away from him. "It was really nothing" "I just miss my family" she smiled feebly at him hoping he'll dismiss the case and she was glad he did.

"I see" he crossed his arms. "Probably some _dango _would help improve your mood. How would you like to go and grab some?"

"Did I just hear free food?" Heisuke suddenly popped from around the corner with a feline like grin.

"Oh forget about it. Maybe next time when it's just the two of us" Okita tilted his head towards Heisuke with a chuckle.

"Hey! You guys! What's up?" Shinpachi walked from behind Heisuke.

"Souji is going to buy her some snacks and I don't get any!" Heisuke demanded.

"Eh?" Sano appeared, leaning on the beam with a sly smile. "Don't tell me someone's making moves on our little princess here"

The trio laughed. Chizuru felt her cheeks heat up.

"Come on you three. Just because you don't get free food you say silly stuff like that" He smirked at them. "Yukimura is pretty cute but she's not my type" he waved a hand as if to dismiss the thought.

"And you just lost your chance with her" Sano laughed.

"You guys stop it. Look at her" Heisuke jumped next to Chizuru and pointed at her flustered cheeks, poking it a bit with his finger. "She'll faint if you keep it up" The other three laughed again and Chizuru covered her cheeks with both her hands.

"Ok" "Ok" "Let's go and get some snacks. My treat" Okita walked away. The trio followed and Chizuru was on the trail.

~~~o~~~o~~~o~~~

It was another one of those really cold mornings. He used to love the snow but now that it makes his coughing worst, he hated it. Slowly he

got up after a series of violent coughs. He isn't doing any better. The medicine he was given just eases the pain and the coughing for a short while but when the effects are gone he'd return to his weak and helpless state. He hated it.

Smiling bitterly he touched his sword which lies next to him. \_"I know I can still fight" but\_ his thoughts were interrupted by another series of agonizing coughs. Lifting his hand from his mouth which covered it he saw blood again. He clenched his hand and stumbled up to go to the small basin in the side of his room. The water was cold but he dipped his dirtied hand in it. The blood spread like smoke on the clear water. Looking at it, he realized how he'd probably die in sickness and not in battle. He groaned at the thought of it. Someone then called for him from outside the door.

"Souji? Are you awake?" It was Hijikata.

Quickly he covered the basin with the nearby cloth before replying. "Yes. Come in"

Hijikata couldn't dismiss the paleness of the man that stood before him. His shoulder were a bit slouched and there was an exhausted touch in his appearance.

"Souji, is everything alright?" he asked as he entered the room.

"Eh? You always worry too much about me" he chuckled. "I actually feel guilty that I might be the reason for one of the lines in your forehead."

Hijikata quickly tapped his forehead then groaned. "Well, yes. You are a handful"

Okita laughed. "So what brings you here?"

"Are you aware that it's way past breakfast?"

"Really?" he feigned innocence but he knew well that the sun was almost at its peak.

"Kondo-san is really worried but he's talking to some guest and so I'm here on his behalf"

"That's sweet of you but you can tell him that I'm just fine"

Hijikata knew the man was lying but he knew as well that the man wouldn't admit that he's really in a bad shape at the moment. He sighed. "Try your best to recuperate then" he turned to go but Souji called his attention.

"Hijikata-san" he took a step forward. "You might want to check on our little pet. She seems to be really upset lately"

Hijikata raised a brow. "Her emotional state isn't really on the top of my concerns" he said it a bit sternly that Okita chuckled. He then quickly left the room. On his way down the hall he pondered on what might be wrong with her. She seems happy to him. \_"I shall talk to her then"\_ he sighed as he crossed his arms.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

It was after dinner and the men are either in their quarters or were drinking. Making sure that the area surrounding the well was clear, he approached Chizuru who was humming some tune he doesn't recognize as she washed the dishes.

"I heard that you've been pretty upset lately" he leaned back the nearby tree and watched the look of surprise in Chizuru's face upon seeing him. She stood up and wiped her hands on some cloth.

"Hijikata" she muttered. "I'm notâ€|" she shook her head.

Hijikata took a step closer and looked her in the eyes, stopping her. He can notice dark circles under her eyes, something that weren't present before. "You haven't been sleeping have you?"

Chizuru bit her lip. When he's looking at her like that she just can't find it in herself to lie. His eyes were searching her, scolding her and at the same time reaching out to her. She forced a small laugh. "I was just thinking about things lately"

"What things?" his brows furrowed as he crossed his arms casually.

She looked away from him. "Nothing much reallyâ€| just this and that" she scratched the back of her head.

"Do you realize that you're not making any sense?"

She smiled weakly and nodded. "I'm sorry"

"Then what's wrong?" he inquired, sounding more impatient.

Clasping her hands together in front of her, she focused on the ground beneath her in hopes that he wouldn't see her tears. "I was just having nightmares lately" she started as tears rolled down her cheeks to the ground uncontrollably. She's been holding them back for too long that the dam probably just broke. "I guessâ€|I wouldâ€| neverâ€|forget" she said in between sobs. Before she knew it she rushed to him then hid her face in his chest. "I justâ€|" she paused upon feeling a hand pat her head as his other arm wrapped around her waist.

He can feel her tremble. He knew that the experiences she had been pretty awful. He could do nothing to protect her from things that have already occurred or neither can he cut down her nightmares with his sword but he would be there for her to ease her worries.

Everything was quiet for a while, with only the sound of her sobbing and the music of the wind as it rustled the leaves in the trees. In silence, he searched for words to say to comfort her but he found none. Realizing that maybe his presence was enough to make her feel better; he held her tighter and planted a kiss on her head, completely forgetting about the risk of someone seeing them.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

"What do you think, Yamazaki?" Hijikata asked before taking a sip from his cup of tea.

"Forgive me but I couldn't find any way to get really close to them and find out about their plans. I tried to infiltrate the household, pretending to apply as a guard but the head of the house dismissed his head of security's suggestion to add more men to guard their home." Yamazaki ducked her head once more.

"It's alright. The head of the family must be pretty cunning and vigilante. Well they are the ones responsible for stocking everyone up with western weapons, that's expected" Hijikata closed his eyes as if to think.

"Yes he is" Yamazaki sat up.

"Actually there is another chance for us to get inside the household" Shimada joined in and everyone else in the room turned their attention to him.

"What about it?" Hijikata inquired.

"They're hiring some house help" Shimada replied. "I got into some small talk with one of the house helpers in the market and she actually told me more about it when I told her that my daughter was looking for a job"

"That's Shimada for you! So was she hot?" Shinpachi laughed then stopped when Hijikata glanced at him.

Shimada chuckled. "Actually she is" he said making the other men in the room laugh, including Chizuru. "Back to the topic. I was told that several of their house help were sent to wait after the house head's niece who was going to marry into some noble family. They are a bit short-handed now"

"Can you get yourself hired, Yamazaki?" Kondo inquired.

"I could sir but there's a problem."

Kondo raised a brow. "What is it?"

Shimada cleared his throat. "They are hiring by recommendation and only women are going to be picked."

There was a sudden burst of laughter in the room, from the trio, Okita and even a chuckle from Saitou.

"What's so funny now?" Hijikata was obviously irritated.

"Sorryâ€|" Okita tried to stop laughing. "It's just thatâ€|." He paused to laugh again.

"Souji!" Hijikata exclaimed.

Sano raised his hand as he managed to stop laughing. "We thought that you'd ask Yamazaki to pretend as a woman and let him apply as a maid" after saying this Sano laughed again.

"Oh jeezâ€|can you imagine that?!" Shinpachi interjected.

Yamazaki turned red. In his head he also imagined himself wearing women's clothes. He knew that it was possible that they ask that from him.

"Of course I wouldn't. That would be pretty stupid. He'd get busted." Hijikata scratched his head with a tired sigh.

"Then what should we do Toshi?" Kondo turned to his vice-commander.

"We could just pay someone to act as my daughter and spy for us. Getting the job wouldn't be a problem because the lady told me that I just have to look for her and she'd get my 'daughter' in" Yamada spoke up.

"That would be risky though" Sannan suddenly spoke up. "If we can buy that person's services and her secrecy then that means she can do the same for others as well. The last thing we'd want for a mission like this is a double crosser. Information is a delicate thing and our next plans would rely on the materials we gather."

"He's right" Hijikata picked up his cup but didn't drink. "Anyone else have a suggestion?" On the side of his eye he saw Saitou raise his hand. "What's in your mind?"

"We can send Yukimura" he said simply.

"WHAT?" the trio blurted out in unison.

Okita chuckled. "That's a plan"

Yamazaki, Yamada, Kondo and Sannan turned their gazes at Chizuru who was more surprised that anyone else in the room.

Hijikata cleared his throat. In the back of his mind he expected this suggestion to come up but he really disapproves it. "Any other suggestion?"

"Hijikata-san" Sannan turned to him looking serious. "Saitou is right. She would be the perfect person for the job. We can't just look over that. She can do housework perfectly, she is a woman and as far as I can tell she is trustworthy"

"But I'm sure she won't agree to it" Hijikata rebutted.

"Why don't we ask her?" Okita said glancing at Chizuru who pushed herself further into the corner.

With all eyes on her, she felt the pressure weighing on her. She wouldn't mind doing it. In fact she would be glad to do it for them. It's a way for her to pay them back for their kindness but taking a look at Hijikata's face, she can tell that he wanted her to say no.

"Uhhmmmâ€|" she started well. "I don't mind. I would want to be of help to everyone" she said, looking only at Kondo who had a smile on his face. She figured that Hijikata would understand her decision.



Besides she was not scared to do a little spying for them.

Heisuke moved next to Chizuru and placed an arm around her shoulder.  
"Way to go Yukimura!"

"But wouldn't it be dangerous?" Shinpachi inquired.

"That's why I don't agree with this" Hijikata groaned.

Chizuru decided to speak up. "Butâ€|but it'll be alright. I'll be working there like everyone else and report whatever I hear right?" she paused and swiped a look at everyone. "I'm not scaredâ€|because I trust you guys"

Everyone looked at her with a surprised look, except for Hijikata who completely disapproves of the plan.

"Wow! That was sweet!" Shinpachi beamed.

"Of course, we won't let anything happen to you on the mission" Sano added.

"I'll go with her" Saitou suddenly said. Everyone looked at him, astounded with the sound of conviction in his words.

Suddenly Heisuke burst into a hearty laugh. "So you'd be a woman too!?"

"Of course not" he sighed. "If needed then I wouldn't mind" he said without a change in his calm demeanor.

"Kondo-san" Hijikata turned to the commander. "I suggest that we talk about it again tomorrow. I know that we must decide quickly but let's take the night to at least make a plan of some sort before diving into action. I promise that in the afternoon tomorrow we'd already be moving into action.

The commander nodded and so did Sannan who was already in deep thought in their plan of action.

Chizuru didn't expected things to turn out that way. She slowly raised her head to take a peek at Hijikata and felt shivers down her spine as her orbs locked with his. To her astonishment a small smile appeared on his lips, she returned the smile then went on with her job of refilling empty tea cups.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Note:<strong> \_From now on I'll try my best to update this one chapter every week. I really want to finish this fic hihhi and I'm really excited to write the next chapter! Anyway see you next week dear readers! \_

### 13. Red is the Color of Passion

**\*\*Red is the color of Passion\*\***

Chizuru stood quietly under the tree behind the captains' quarters. Hijikata said that he'd like to talk to her about something before

she goes to the mansion to get hired as house help that afternoon. She sighed at the thought of the mission. She was worried about it because she doesn't want to screw up, not because she was scared. She doesn't know much about the details of the current political state of their country and isn't an expert on political tactics and theories but she has basic knowledge about the government and eating dinner with the captains kept her updated to current events. She was confident that she would be able to grasp the information she could collect and pass them on clearly.

"Don't furrow your brows" Hijikata stopped a couple of steps from Chizuru who instantly looked up at him with a warm smile.

"Hijikata" she placed a hand on her brows to cover them. "Were they furrowed? But probably not as furrowed as yours" she giggled.

"Tsk." His brows furrowed. "They suit me well so it's not an issue" he paused. "Anyway about your mission" he sighed. "I want you to know that I'm putting no pressure on you. Just come back in one piece. And don't forget that if you have to pass on information, Yamazaki or Shimada are in the market posing as vendors everyday"

Chizuru nodded. "I will."

"And I heard that the master of the house is quite young" he paused and looked elsewhere to cover his embarrassment. "I heard that the maids of the house all take a fancy on him"

Chizuru giggled. She knew where this was going but she enjoys the light dash of pink on his cheeks when he acts like this, so she let him continue.

"I trust you completely but don't get close with him" he cleared his throat. "If he flirts with you ignore him, even if you come out impolite"

"But how could I get.." she was interrupted.

"Eavesdrop!" he scowled.

"I know" she didn't worry I always keep in mind your words to me" she beamed at him.

He crossed his arms, his brows still furrowed as he looked at her sideways. "What's that?"

Before Chizuru can answer Shinpachi, Sano and Heisuke walked by the terrace and spotted them.

"Oh! Hijikata-san!" Heisuke beamed. "Eh? Yukimura. What are you guys doing here?"

Shinpachi pushed Heisuke to start walking. "Can't you see those furrowed brows" he said in a failed attempt to make his voice soft.

"That means die, Heisuke" Sano added. "We'd just pick up Yukimura's corpse and bury it later." He beamed at Chizuru.

"What did you say?" Hijikata growled and the three laughed in

reply.

"Eh!? Hijikata don't scold her like you do with me. Remember women are more sensitive and you'reâ€¦"

Hijikata stopped Heisuke's babbling with a glare. "If you don't stopâ€¦"

"I get it. Sorry." Heisuke interrupted and ducked his head. He straightened up, clasped his hands behind his head. "Anyway, why are you scolding him?"

"I am not" Hijikata sighed.

"I knew it. You were born with that scowl" Shinpachi laughed and the two followed.

"Tsk. I was just giving her some guidelines for her mission" he walked towards the three and Chizuru followed.

"Oh yeah. Take it easy Yukimura" Sano patted Chizuru's shoulder, she just nodded.

"I almost forgot about our session with the newbies" Shinpachi scratched his head as he remembered where they were heading.

"While you're at it, remind them not to show their drunken faces to me. You know how I hate that" Hijikata reminded.

"Of course" Shinpachi beamed and the three moved on.

Hijikata turned to Chizuru. "Your clothes would be delivered by Yamazaki to your room later"

"Clothes?"

"You need women clothing. The family is a rich one so make sure you look presentable" with that he started walking away. "I'll see you later"

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

After taking a bath, Chizuru went back to her room and found the new set of clothes in the middle of her room. Pulling it up, her eyes sparkled. It was pretty, simple but it suited her taste. The kimono was light blue with simple white flower design and the obi was purple.

She didn't have a huge mirror to see how she looked but she felt comfortable in it. It has been a while since she last wore women's clothing and truth is she missed wearing them. She tied her hair up and finished her look with a light dash of red tint on her lips. After making sure that she looked presentable enough she stood up and practiced her self-introduction. As she took a bow the door slid open, looking up her eyes met Hijikata's.

He slid the door close and stood still on his place. His heart started racing. _"Kamiâ€¦why does she have to be this beautiful?"_ he thought as he tried to remember why he went there.

"Is something wrong?" she asked looking down a bit.

"No~|No~|you're~|just perfect" he said the last words in almost a whisper.

"Is it time to go?" she asked walking closer to him.

"Ah not yet" he paused, his eyes glued on her. "You'd depart in an hour~|" he realized that he had no reason for going there. He just wanted to be the first to see her in the outfit which he picked himself.

"I see~|" she stood less than an arm's length from him and something about the way he acts made her nervous.

"Hijikata, I~|"

"Chizuru, I~|"

The two spoke at the same time, with locked gazes they chuckled.

"You go first" Chizuru urged.

"Ah no~| it's nothing" he returned to his serious self.

Chizuru's hand brushed on his and he took hers in his as it did. "It's about that thing you always say that I'd never forget" she looked away from him a bit. He never fails to make her flush but she likes that about him.

Placing his fingers on her chin, he turned her face to him. "What about it?"

"I'll never forget that" she paused as she noticed that he leaned down and inched his face closer to hers. He brushed his thumbs over her red lips, the same way he always do. Closing the space between them, he placed a short kiss on her lips. "I'm yours" she whispered to him as their lips parted.

With that said he pulled her body to his and this time gave her a more heated kiss. He wouldn't be seeing her in a while and he knew that he would long for her. Tracing her lip with his tongue, he tasted her and probed deeper. Parting from each other for some air, he playfully bit her lower lip and trailed kisses down her jaw to the crook of her neck.

They stayed that way for a minute or more, his face buried on the base of her neck, her forehead resting on his shoulder as they embraced each other.

Chizuru unwrapped herself from him. "Someone might see you coming here. Now that they know I'm a girl, seeing you from my room would cause some serious issues"

"I know." He groaned. "Yamazaki would get you when it's time to go" with that he left.

~~~o~~~o~~~o~~~

"Yukimura" Heisuke almost dropped his cup of tea.

"What a babe!" Shinpachi exclaimed with a grin. "That's our girl!"

"You'd be too pretty for a house maid. The men in the house hold might take a liking to you. So be careful" Sano added.

Hijikata's brow twitched up then he cleared his throat to silence the men. "You'd be back in a couple of weeks or a month, depending on how things go. Saitou would try to secure a job in the mansion too, sometime after you get accepted." He paused and took one last look at her. Their eyes met and for a moment he felt an impulse to embrace her but swallowed the thought. "Good luck. Yukimura" with that he dismissed her.

~~~~~

"Wow your daughter is a beauty to behold." The woman guided Chizuru and Shimada through the entry path for servants. "Your mother must be very beautiful"

Shimada scratched the back of his neck with a chuckle. "I thought she got all that from me"

The woman giggled. "Oh I don't mean anything, good sir. You're pretty good looking but she doesn't seem to take after you"

"Oh! That's good to hear." Shimada replied. They entered a room and took a seat around a table.

"You see I'm the one responsible for leading the maids now. Luckily there are only three others at the moment plus you, that makes four." She smiled at Chizuru. "Honestly the place is huge and is hard to clean but the girls takes on that effectively"

Chizuru assessed that the woman was kind and he takes pride in what she do. She returned her smiles and made sure to be courteous to her.

"You don't have to worry about your daughter's welfare. We eat well and have enough hours of sleep." She continued to explain. "The salary is given at the end of the week. If she works well enough then maybe she'd get absorbed even when the original maids return from Osaka."

"I see. Well then I'd leave her to under your care" Shimada ducked his head. After a couple more words with the woman, he left.

"So it's Chizuru right?" the woman placed a hand over hers.

"Yes" Chizuru nodded.

"I know this is your first time away from home but don't worry the girls are friendly"

"Please take care of me" she ducked her head and lifted it when the woman giggled.

"Of course. I treat my girls like daughters." She paused. "Oh, before I forget you'd be assigned to serve our master. With that I mean you need to clean after his mess" a soft laughter escaped the woman's lips. "The maid who was assigned to him decided to get married so she left. She was pretty happy to leave the post because the man is a bit hard to deal with but you'll do just fine. I can feel it" she tapped the young girl's shoulder.

"I'll do my best" Chizuru ducked her head once more. _"How convenient. This job should be easier"_ she thought.

"I'd introduce you to our master after dinner" the woman announced. "But for now let's go to your quarters and get you changed into your uniform."

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

After dinner Chizuru was led into the inner part of the mansion. She was a bit nervous to meet the master of the house but all the other girls were all praises for him. Though it seems that the guy can be a bit snobbish or haughty from time to time but she wasn't one to judge a person without meeting them so she skipped over their comments.

They stopped in front of a painted sliding door. Kneeling outside the woman, Rika, announced their arrival.

"Kazama-sama, it's Jyushiro-san. I'm with your new personal helper" she was interrupted by the man.

"I didn't need one. I told you that before Rika" well actually I could use someone who can make me better tea" There was a sigh. "Alright, come in"

"Thank you, Kazama-sama" she slid the door open and asked Chizuru to step in.

Chizuru got a bad feeling the instant she heard the name Kazama. She's heard it before and she had a feeling that it would complicate things for her. Stepping in she kept her head down. "Good evening, Kazama-sama. I'm" she stopped when Kazama spoke.

Kazama didn't expect his path to cross with the woman's again but he smiled at the sudden twist of fate. "Rika, leave us please"

"But" Rika suddenly got worried with the master's request.

"Rika, go practice making tea so that you don't end up killing me" Kazama teased.

"Alright Kazama-sama" she replied with a pout then left. She's been serving in the household for years and Kazama asked her to just take it easy around him, probably because of her blunders which he found comedic when she was just starting.

When Rika left, he got off the windowsill where he always sits and sat in front of his new servant.

"Never have it crossed my mind that we'd meet again" he snickered. "Raise your head"

Chizuru wasn't wrong with her assumption. It was the guy she met months back. She kept her composure despite the surprise. "It's nice to meet you, Kazama-sama"

"Tch." He waved a hand to dismiss the air of formality. "Come on, drop the formality."

"I'm sorry but as your servant I cannot" she replied.

"You're so serious about being my servant. I don't dislike thatâ€|uhmâ€|Now that I think about it, I never got your name"

"Yukimura Chizuru" she was told to use her real name, that way she won't get confused. Truth is that the men in the Shinsengumi don't know her first name and they didn't bother to ask. Only Hijikata knows that her name was Chizuru and now the master of the house.

"Chizuru" he mumbled her name then glanced at her. "So what brought you here Chizuru? The temple kicked you out? I thought you wanted to become a holy woman? You gave up on that? And what happened to your men's outfit?"

Chizuru felt panic surge at the bottom of her stomach. She wasn't prepared for this but she can make something up. "Ah wellâ€|it's a long story but I can say that things went well with me. I â€|I found my father" upon saying that she paused and remembered her real father.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm here in Kyoto to find my father" she realized that she never got to tell him anything about her before, so things were working her way.

"That's the reason why you came here dressed as a boy? Why did your father left you anyway? You should've smacked him hard when you found him"

"It was for job opportunities here in Kyoto. He happen to know Jyushiro-san and that's how I got the job"

"I see" Kazama leaned forward to inspect her. "I always knew that you'd look better dressed as a woman. It was a waste of your beauty to hide in men's clothing"

Chizuru tried not to blush with the way he stared. She remembered Hijikata's reminder not to let the man flirt with her but she can't be rude as well, now that she learnt that the man was the one who saved her back then. "Please don't flatter me"

Kazama laughed. "I'd be expecting a nice hot tea in the morning along with my breakfast. I eat in my room most of the time, so you'd bring it here. They say I'm a mess so I expect you to clean up after me. Also I wouldn't mind if you act normally when were alone. I like being respected, it makes me feel superior but I make exemptions." He paused. "And I like that shade of red on your lips. The maid in this house should be presentable at all times, since we always have important visitors. So forget about your man clothes. Is that

clear?"

Chizuru ducked her head. "Of course, Kazama-sama"

"Well then, good night Chizuru" he dismissed her with a smirk.

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They lay on their side face to face, her head rested on his extended arm. It was pretty cold outside but she can feel nothing but warmth. A smile tugged on her lips as he took hold of her hand and kissed it before entangling his fingers with hers. Her hand was small compared to his calloused ones but he held her gently. They stared at each other for a while before she removed her hand from his.

_ "__Do you believe in fate?" she asked as removed a stray strand of raven hair from his forehead with her finger. _

_He chuckled. "You mean the red strings of fate thatâ€|" he caught her hand again, folded the other fingers only leaving the pinky up. "is tied around this finger?" _

_She nodded with a smile. "When I was young one of my playmates said that her dream was to find the person on the other end of her string" she glanced at her pinky then lock her orbs with his once more.

_

_ "__Do you think she found that person?" _

_ "__I hope so" she adjusted her head on his arm, moving a bit closer to him. "Everyone wants to find that other person on the end of the line. Many other lines are entangled with a person's string but it is connected to only one" _

_ "__You really believe that?" he let her hand go, placing it on his waist. _

_Her hand crept to his back and she allowed her finger tips to brush his skin playfully. "I do" she replied with a blush. _

_ "__Then I think I should too" he smiled, sliding his hand down her hair. _

_ "__Why?" she asked as she removed the space between them.

_

_ "__Because mine is probably connected with yours" he replied a bit coyly before taking her lips in his, once more igniting the embers of passion that cold winter night._

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Chizuru abruptly opened her eyes and sat up. Scratching her eyes with back of her hand she noticed that the other maids are already fixing their beds. She took a minute though to clear her head. That dream brought a smile on her face, dusting shades of pink over her nose and cheeks. Looking down at her pinky, she remembered that even when she's away from him, they are connected by that single red thread that would always bring them back to each other.



## 14. Consorting with the Enemy

### \*\*Consorting with the Enemy\*\*

It has been a week since she started working as a helper in the mansion. So far she hasn't gained any useful information and the week itself was uneventful. Working around Kazama wasn't that hard, he'd let her go on errands and his room can be a mess but he treated her well. There was also the casual flirting which she tried to evade effectively. He was an attractive and charismatic man, no wonder why the other women swoon over him but not her of course.

"\_\_I wonder what he's doing right now"\_ Chizuru thought of Hijikata with a small smile as she continued to hum a song she would sing to him every now and then. Lifting the bowls that she had finished washing to the table to dry, she turned around and was greeted by Kazama who leaned by the door.

"Chizuru, I'm bored" he straightened up and walked towards her.  
"Let's take a walk"

"Eh?" Chizuru almost dropped the bowls but managed to land them safely on the table. "I still have work to do andâ€¦"

"Need I remind you who just requested something from you?" he narrowed his eyes at her.

"Of course not Kazama-sama" she ducked her head. "I understand"

Kazama moved behind her and pulled the end of one ribbon that held her apron around her waist. "Let's go" he dropped the apron over the bowls and took her hand in his.

Chizuru tried to pull her hand away but he would hold it tighter. "I don't think it's appropriate for you to hold your servant's hand"

"Who said that?" he replied simply and took a turn around the corner and headed for the hall that lead out the garden.

"Uhhhâ€¦wellâ€¦ it's protocol that there should beâ€¦". She paused as he let her hand go.

"I know that" he sounded irritated. Kazama turned from her and looked down the pond in the middle of the garden. "You see that one?"

Chizuru stood a couple of steps from his side. She peeked at the pond and saw a big \_Koi \_fish swimming around. Its scales are glistening colors of orange and silvery white. "Amazing" she remarked as she squatted down to look at it closer.

"That one can eat you alive you know" he smirked as she instantly stood up and backed away from the pond.

"That's impossible"

"Of course. I just wanted to see how gullible you can get" he chuckled.

Chizuru looked down feeling embarrassed. It was then that on the side of her eye she caught sight of Saitou. He was wearing shabby clothes and a straw hat. It looks like he secured a job as a gardener. She made sure that she made no actions that would make Kazama believe that she is in anyway acquainted with the person. Looking back at Kazama, she saw the distant look in his eyes as he looked down the pond.

"Is something wrong?" she glanced at him.

"No. I was just thinking about how things are going. At the moment it doesn't seem like the turmoil in the capital would cease any moment soon. As much as I am interested with the current affairs it also makes me realize how rotten humans are" he locked gazes with her and was glad to find someone who has an interested gleam in their eyes about the topic, aside from the men he works with.

"Why'd you say that?" she asked even though she has the same opinion about people. She knew that not everyone is bad but people of capable of becoming monsters in a flick. Humans are bound by the necessary evils of the world and everyone should hold out for their own. It's a dog eat dog world and lucky are those who are saved from its savagery.

"When you think about it, everyone who's involved themselves in this war doesn't fight for a belief or honor or the future of this country." He crossed his arms and tilted his head to her. "They fight for their own selfish reasons. For power or prestige"

\_"Then why do involve yourself by providing men weapons to destroy each other?"\_ Chizuru thought as she clasped her hands behind her. "Not all fight for themselves though. I'm sure there are some who does it for a good reason"

"Like who?" he then remembered that she used to live in the temple where the Shinsegumi currently resides. A spark of doubt about her appeared in his mind. When he thinks about it, she must've spent some time with them so she won't blame her she got influenced. But he can't dismiss the sudden suspicion he had of her. \_"Could she be here for a reason? Is she lying?"\_

There was a while of silence. Chizuru didn't want to reply with "the Shinsengumi" because she might spark suspicion. Keeping silent like she knew nothing was probably a good thing. She can feel him staring at her, so she decided to break the silence.

"I don't think we can say who. Ones thoughts and motives are their own" she unclasped her hands.

"You're right. We'll never know" In his head he concluded that he was over thinking things. Besides if she has some motives for working at the mansion they'll show eventually. Till then he'd try to win the heart of the woman to whom he was undeniably attracted to. It would keep him from being bored.

~~~o~~~o~~~o~~~

Hijikata placed closed his notebook before allowing Yamazaki to enter his room.

"Hijikata-san, there aren't any information yet, from both Saitou and Chizuru" Yamazaki reported.

"I see. Have you managed to send the letter?"

"Yes. They agreed to meet with you and Kondo-san"

"Good. Thank you" with that Yamazaki left. Hijikata turned to his table with a sigh. They should think of more ways on how to get leverage over their opponent. With the way things are now, the odds wouldn't be in their favor in case of an unexpected confrontation. They might be outnumbered by a hundred or more. Worse is that they might not be equally equipped.

He stood up and decided to go get some tea. It would probably help clear his head a bit.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Chizuru stood in front of a table where two haori are laid. One was moss green with detailed design on its hems and the other was a plain gray but obviously expensive looking haori. She has no idea of his preference but since it's for a formal dinner she thought that the plain one would be appropriate.

"I think this one would do well with your outfit" she turned around with the gray haori in her hands.

Taking it, he suavely wore it over his blue kimono. "Thanks" he muttered before picking up his lighted pipe which lay on an ashtray on the table.

"If there isn't anything else, I'd be on my way to the kitchen. I believe that my assistance is required there" Chizuru ducked her head.

"Sure. Please do make the tea. Yours is a hundred fold better than Rika's" he opened his window and sat on the window sill. "And please call me when the guests have arrived"

With a positive nod Chizuru ran to the kitchen. She felt a bit excited. She was sure that they are going to discuss things over dinner and she'd have something to report after more than a week of her service in the mansion.

In the kitchen she helped the two new recruits in wiping the utensils to be used before helping Rika with the main dish. She told her that Kazama requested that she made tea and it made Rika start to complain about their master. It was fun working with everyone else that it almost made her forget to think of how she'd get to hang around the dining area. The ones assigned to serve at dinner were Rika and those who originally served the family. The new recruits, which included her, were assigned on kitchen duty.

Finally the guests have arrived and the dinner would commence soon. She and the other new recruits were advised to stay in the kitchen. The other girls talk about their personal lives, while Chizuru kept

herself busy with the food.

An hour or so has already passed and the sweets and tea were taken to the dining area. At this point Chizuru decided that she better excuse herself so that she could do some eavesdropping. Discussing important matters over the main course might ruin one's appetite and so they are discussed towards the end of the meal, making it the perfect time to snoop around.

"I'd have to go to the bathroom. Excuse me" she said in the middle of her conversation with the other girls, putting on a cringe on her face and a hand over her stomach.

"That must be Ise's smoked eels. I told you not to touch those" said one of the girls.

Ise, who sat across Chizuru got up and looked worriedly at her. "My eels aren't that bad right?"

Chizuru smiled at her. "They were tasty" she tried not to offend her but her eels were too salty.

She hurried down the corridors of the mansion to the dining area. Pinning herself on the solid wall, next to the sliding doors, she heard the conversation from inside perfectly. Before starting with her mission she tried to look around for a place to hide just in case someone comes out from the room but there was none. She considered hurrying to the nearest corner and disappearing there as her escape option.

"It would be perfect if we provoke them into a fight now" said one man.

"He's right" replied the other. "They have no means to fight us on equal footing"

"Don't forget. They are skilled and experienced swordsmen. You shouldn't put your guard down" It was Kazama who spoke.

"We know but they are really a pain in our side"

"They are fighting a losing battle. Didn't anyone told them that"

"But faith, my friend, can turn the tides"

"Faith in what? Faith that their swords can stop the inevitable and necessary change in our country"

Chizuru estimated that there are probably around a dozen men inside and aside from the lines that she can hear clearly there were small talks on the side too. She looked around for a bit before she continued listening to the men.

"Once this Tokugawa dies, believe me everything would just crumble away with it"

"Your weapons would help us pave the way to our country's future Kazama-san. When all this is over you should enter politics. We can always back you up"

"I supply weapons for business but I don't want to get myself involved in politics" Kazama replied, with a slight hint of annoyance. "I'm always told that my business would go hand in hand with politics but I really don't want to immerse myself in it"

"Why? Your family is a noble one and I'm sure money won't be an issue with you. Also you're smart and charismatic"

"Thanks for the compliments but I'd rather stay on the sidelines"

"So when would the next shipment of weapons arrive? We have around a hundred men fresh out of training and hungry for battle to suit up"

"In a couple of weeks probably. A day or two before the delegate from the west arrives"

"Are they new models of guns?"

"There would be new models of rifles and I believe a dozen of short arms too. Gentlemen, if you'd excuse me for a while" Kazama said.

On cue Chizuru ran to the end of the hall and turned the corner. She can hear his footfalls but she didn't look back and returned quickly to the kitchen, starting a conversation right away like nothing happened.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Saitou found Hijikata standing in the yard behind the captain's quarters. At first he thought that the man was asleep while standing but realized that he was probably just trying to relax. It was a cloudy and fairly windy day. Since it's just after lunch it was actually the perfect time to get some shut eye.

Approaching Hijikata, he called for his attention as he neared. "Hijikata-san. I'm sorry to interrupt but I've got some information from Chizuru"

Upon hearing her name, Hijikata opened his eyes and turned to face Saitou. "What did she say?"

Saitou wasn't sure but he thought he saw a passing smile on his face. "In a couple of weeks there would be a shipment of weapons. No exact date but it would be a day or two before some foreign delegate comes to the capital"

"I see." He thought that they could definitely do something about the weapons. "How is she doing?"

"She's doing well. It seems that the head of the house has taken interest in her." Upon saying that, he noticed the raising of the vice commander's brow.

"What made you say that he's fond of her?" he tried to keep a straight face.

"I saw them talking in the garden a couple of times and he was very

attentive to what she was saying. I also noticed that he'd watch her as she worked from time to time" Saitou noticed the sudden change in Hijikata's calm demeanor.

"That would be an advantage to her information gathering" he stated it with an obvious hint of annoyance. "Thank you"

Saitou left and he stood there alone for some time, annoyed and tired. Stomping his feet as he returned to his quarters. _"A nap might make me feel better_._" _Pinching the bridge of his nose, he sat in front of his table and rested his head on it over his arm. _"â€|Chizuruâ€|"_ with a sigh he closed his eyes and drifted to sleep.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Kazama watched the fish in his pond as it restlessly circles around. Extending his hand over the side of the pond, he sprinkled some crumbs for the fish to eat. The crescent moon has reflected on the pond but it's image distort the moment the fish came up to collect his food. On the side of his eye he saw Chizuru walking on the terrace.

"Chizuru" Kazama called the attention of the helper who quickly went to him, ready to fulfill his request.

"Yes, Kazama-sama" she ducked her head.

He can't help but smile at her insistence to address him formally. It was very obvious to how she tries hard to keep her distance, which somehow challenged him too win her over. "Do you still have something you need to do?"

Chizuru shook her head. "No"

"Good" he glanced at her. "You can keep me company"

Chizuru just stood quietly beside him and looked down the pond like he was doing.

"How was it living next to the Shinsengumi?" He noticed the confusion in her reaction upon hearing his question but nothing else. "I mean you sure brush elbows with them while you're in the temple right?"

Chizuru gave her master a calm smile and a nod. "I don't work closely with them but sometimes I'm asked to do some cleaning for them. We don't talk much though." She didn't expect this question but she can't let her composed exterior crack.

"Did any of them figure out that you're a woman? I mean they're a bunch of wolves" Kazama turned his head to her. Her hair was tied low and was kept over her right shoulder. He can only see half her face but he caught that small smile playing on her lips as she spoke.

"I don't think any of them know" Chizuru at this point was starting to feel uneasy that she wanted to change the topic but she feared that it may appear as if she was dodging it.

"You must be pretty good then" Kazama loved how she tilted her head

to the side in confusion. Her brown orbs locking with his and with the small distance between them he got the urge to grab her by the waist and pull her closer to him.

"With what?"

"Pretending" he caught the passing worry in her eyes. "as a boy."

Chizuru smiled trying to keep her composure. "Oh thatâ€|well I think I am"

There was a short pause but the fish jumped up and getting their attention.

"I never thought it could do that" Chizuru looked down the pond.

"It looks bored" Kazama crossed his arms and looked down the pond as well. The fish swam away.

Chizuru's gaze followed it as it swam away. "It's alone. It would really be bored if not sad" she glanced at Kazama and caught his gaze. He was handsome and there was something in the way that he looks at her that made her cheeks heat up instantly.

"Being alone doesn't entail sadness" he noticed that her cheeks were dusted with hues of pink. He felt glad that he can have that effect on her.

"But prolonged isolation does." She gave him a warm smile. "No one should be alone. Life is tough enough for one to walk it alone." Claspng her hands in front of her she continued. "When you're alone you have no one to talk to, eat with, try new things with, laugh and cry with. It's very sad when you think about it"

"Are you afraid of being alone?"

"In a way, Yes. And you?"

He smiled curtly. "I don't know. I think I've been alone for a long time now"

"But you're surrounded by brilliant people andâ€|"

"Yeah but so what. It wouldn't matter if they all mean nothing to you. You can always stand in the middle of the crowd and feel helplessly alone"

Chizuru felt a prick in her heart upon hearing him say that. The man who seem to have everything, for a moment sounded like he has nothing of worth. She felt the urge to place a hand on his arm and tell him it's alright but she held back.

"Then find someone who'd end that isolation" she suggested with another warm smile.

Kazama chuckled, closing the distance between them with a step. "Would there be anyone capable of that?"

"Of course. There is always that one person who would understand you,

make you smile even on the worst moments andâ€¦" she paused. "save you from whatever hell you are in"

Kazama laughed. He can't believe he's taking an advice from her. "You're a romantic aren't you?"

"Eh? I was justâ€¦" she stopped when he placed a hand on her cheek.

"I really find you interesting." He let his fingers glide down her cheek before retrieving his hand.

"Kazama-samaâ€¦" she muttered feeling guilty that her heart fluttered at his touch.

Kazama turned from her. "You have duties in the morning. You better go to bed." He walked away, not because he was tired but because he felt like he was falling deeper into some trap that was her.

Chizuru ducked her head. "Good night, Kazama-sama" he didn't replied but she was sure he heard it. Placing a hand over her chest, she scolded herself for letting her guard down so easily. Her thoughts then wondered to Hijikata. She knew he'd scowl at her when he learns about this and the thought of that made her laugh. She missed him and hoped that she could see him soon.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Note:<strong> \_I hope you enjoyed Hijikata and Chizuru's good time cause...well... hhhmm... Anyway I'd love to hear from you guys!\_

## 15. Whispers of the Heart

**\*\*Whispers of the Heart\*\***

Kazama paced inside his room. Truth is that he couldn't care less about his clients but to have them ambushed on their way to his storehouse, it tells him and his clients something. He could only think of one group who could do a job as clean as that. But when he thinks about the reputation of the man leading the group who was to pick up the goods in his warehouse, he can't help but push his accusations aside. The man was corrupt to the core, even bribed him to get him some drugs that were banned from the country. Men like that deserved to perish but still. Was it just coincidence that they died on the way to pick up the weapons?

His door slid open. Turning around he was greeted by Chizuru's smiling face. He didn't really felt bad about the passing of those men but he is displeased with the fact that his business might be placed in jeopardy. Her presence changes the aura of the room. He watched quietly as she laid down a tray with a cup of tea on his table, beside it she opened a bowl with his breakfast. He grew fond of her cooking and requested that she cook his meals from then on.

"Kazama-sama, breakfast is served. I hope that it is to your liking" she ducked her head and was about to leave the room but he called her.



"Join me" he commanded.

Chizuru just looked at her master, unsure of whether to comply or go. "I'm sorry but Iâ€¦".

"Do I always have to remind you who you're working for" he interrupted, a bit irritated.

Chizuru shook her head and knelt on the space across him. He started eating and she just watched him in silence. She noticed that even his eating was refined. She remembered Heisuke and Shinpachi and how they'd fight over food often. She preferred that kind of setting than a formal, quiet one like this. A smile formed on her lips as she remembered them.

"What are you thinking about with that kind of smile? Something good happened? Or have you finally fallen in love with your master?" he said haughtily with a smirk.

"No" she waved her hand in front of her in denial. "Of course not"

"What a pity. Then clearly you are blind" he drank his tea and resumed eating.

"I'm sorry Kazama-sama. You're an excellent man but I'm not really interested in such things" she wanted to get her position across clearly. The last thing she would want is a pissed off and jealous Hijikata scolding her. Also she doesn't want to hurt the man she love in any way.

Kazama stopped eating and took a sip from his cup. Placing it down, he locked his orbs with hers. "Are you engaged to marry someone?"

"No"

"Are you in love with another man?"

Chizuru knew the answer. It was easy. Of course she was. But her answer might bring consequences to her mission. Yet the last thing she would want is to deny her love. "Yes"

Kazama crossed his arms. "And where is this man you love now?"

Chizuru looked to her side a bit, unsure of what to say. "He's somewhere elseâ€¦"

"I see." He covered his bowl and pushed the tray forward. "You can take this with you. Thank you for the meal"

Chizuru wasn't sure if she angered the man but she did as she was told anyway. Upon stepping out the room, he called her.

"Chizuru" he lighted his pipe. "Does he love you?"

Chizuru knew the answer to that to. Hijikata never said the words to her but with all that he has done for her and the way he would look

at her when he thinks she's not aware was more than enough to tell her how he felt. "Yes. He does" she replied with a smile.

"That makes things complicated" he said to himself.

"Kazama-sama?" she wasn't sure if she can leave or wait for his master's dismissal.

"Just so you know I find you really interesting." He said it with confidence. "I'm not one to sit around and wait for the things I want to just fall into my arms. If you have any way of communicating with your man you better tell him that he's got competition and he's one he should be wary of"

Chizuru almost let the tray fall from her hands in surprise. That is the last thing she would want to tell Hijikata. She remembered his threats to Kazama before when they just met. Composing herself she ducked her head. "Kazama-sama. I'm unworthy of your attention. There are many other fine young women out there who would appreciate your affections"

Kazama laughed. "I know that but you don't tell a man how he should feel, Chizuru. You're dismissed"

With that Chizuru excused herself and rushed to the kitchen where she tried to replay the conversation she just had with the master of the house in disbelief.

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It was time for the afternoon patrols. Hijikata doesn't go with the group unless there is something of importance for him to be done but he met them along the way and decided to walk back to the headquarters with them. It was Shinpachi's group he crossed paths with. They discussed things along the way but his attention suddenly turned to the woman walking in the distance.

"Look" Shinpachi nudged his head towards the woman's direction. "It's our little girl."

Hijikata can't believe his eyes for a bit. For almost a month he haven't got even a glimpse of her but now she was there, walking towards them with another woman carrying the same basket that she does. "Looks like she's doing well" he said calmly as if he doesn't care but in truth he just want to go to her and wrap her in his arms and have her lips against his.

As they passed each other they pretended to be strangers, even Shinpachi. The woman with Chizuru blushed and gazed away from the group of men. Chizuru though caught Hijikata's gaze. In that short moment both felt like holding out a hand, just for a little touch but held back. It was going to make him go crazy. She was so close yet so far once more. He just wanted her to be by his side but not now. They were long past the two but his mind was filled with her. If not for Shinpachi's nudge he wouldn't have snapped out of his thoughts.

"Yes?" he failed to hear what Shinpachi was saying.

Shinpachi moved closer to him with a teasing smile. "Tell me, do you

have a thing for my little girl?"

"Stop saying it like you're her father." Hijikata lashed hiding his embarrassment with a scowl.

Shinpachi laughed at the thought of being a father. "But you didn't answer my question. She's a fine young woman. She'd make a good wife. Besides I don't know if you notice it but you're different around her"

"WHAT DIFFERENT?" he raised his voice then sighed as he noticed that the men behind them who were busy with their own chattering stopped to look at them.

Shinpachi snickered. "Hey, just keep calm. There's nothing wrong about it. I'm so behind you for pursuing her. She seems to be smitten with you too you know. But you better move fast cause she's really pretty and has the making of a good wife. Other men might get her before you do"

"By other men you mean you?" Hijikata scowled.

"No! Of course not. She's pretty and all but she's not really my type. I like them with more curves" he said with a wink.

"Of course. How can I forget that" Hijikata chuckled as he remembered Shinpachi's sometimes desperate attempts to seduce women.

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Chizuru roused early and went with Rika to fetch the tea that was ordered from an overseas trader. She was surprised that tea can cost that much but it was one of the best in the world. Aside from the tea she has another goal. Luckily the crowd was thick in the market that day. She strayed several steps behind Rika and rushed to the corner of the restaurant where Yamazaki was selling trinkets.

"Yukimura" Yamazaki regarded her with a smile. "What can I do for you today?"

Chizuru pretended to look through the many beaded necklaces. "Here" she handed a small folded letter to Yamazaki. "Please give this to Hijikata"

"Consider it done" Yamazaki hid it in his pocket. "Anything else"

"Yes. I really wanted to say this as soon as possible but Saitou wasn't around yesterday and I didn't get to go out. Anyway some man named Oishi visited the mansion and I heard him say that they are preparing to bust the Shinsengumi's meeting inâ€|" she didn't manage to finish as she heard her name called.

"Oh dear! I thought I've lost you!" Rika rushed to her.

"I'm so sorry" Chizuru ducked her head apologetically. "I got left behind because of the crowd so I decided to just stay in one place so that you'd see me right away"

"So you trusted that I'll come for you" Rika chuckled. "I'm just kidding. Of course I'll come back for you dear" what were you looking at anyway"

"Uhhmm" necklaces. They look pretty nice don't you think?" Chizuru forced a smile as she turned to Yamazaki who resumed to being a vendor.

Rika looked at the pieces closely. "They're cute but cheap"

Yamazaki cleared his throat. "They might be cheap but the children made them with love"

Rika ducked her head. "I'm sorry. I can see the effort they placed on it. They'd be creative individuals when they grow up I bet"

"Of course" Yamazaki replied. "Miss have you chosen any?" he turned to Chizuru.

"No. I haven't" she wanted to take it as a chance to finish her sentence but Rika was standing too close. She doesn't want to take the risk of getting busted. "Thank you very much."

"I see. Thank you" Yamazaki said with a nod and watched as the two walked away. They wouldn't know what meeting they'll bust but at least they would have their guards up. Tapping his pocket twice he smiled. He knew that Hijikata would be overjoyed to receive the letter from his lover. How he wished he had someone too but Yamazaki just smiled at the thought of that too.

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Hijikata wasted no time. Upon dismissing Yamazaki he opened her letter with a smile that lately seldom grazes his face.

_I saw you the other day. I wanted to run to you but I can't. I hope that the information I'm passing was able to help. You look like you can use some sleep. Rest well. I miss you more than words can say. I hope I can watch the cherry blossoms in the temple's yard at the night of the full moon with you. _

His eyes rested on her name which she signed at the bottom of her letter. Folding it with care, he slid it in his notebook. Saitou told him that the original helpers would be back some time in the coming month. If they arrive as early as next week then they can pull Chizuru out of the mansion soon too. He sighed. His mind was filled with two things, work and Chizuru but with her letter he was eased. He's got no work to worry about at the moment, so he decided to take her advice and rest.

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"How about this?" Kazama showed Chizuru the rice ball in his hand. The only reply he got from her was a laugh. "What's so funny about it?"

"You pressed it to tightly" Chizuru placed down the twelfth rice ball she made. "That's your fifth one but that's alright"

"I'm really not cut to do this kind of work." Kazama placed the rice

down next to the ones Chizuru made and picked out one of them. "Yours looks perfect" he took a bite. "They taste great too"

"I'm just used to doing many of those" Chizuru continued to make another one.

"Why? Are you from a big family?" he inquired as he finished his food.

"Noâ€¦I used to help in some eatery in Edo" she dodged that one. In truth her cooking skills upgraded the moment she lived with the Shinsengumi.

"I see" Kazama reached for another rice ball but Chizuru pushed his hand away. "Why'd you do that?"

"It's better to start eating once everything is done" Chizuru watched as her master took it anyway.

"I don't see the point in waiting when it's right in front of you" he started munching.

"Aren't this for your visitors later?"

"Yes. But you can make more for them"

"You asked me to teach you how to make them but you ended up eating them" Chizuru said with a sigh. She was looking forward to finishing preparing the food early but that would be impossible with Kazama around.

"I told you. I'm not cut out for this" he said and to his surprise Chizuru snatched the food from his hand.

"That's just an excuse Kazama-sama. Why don't you give it another try?"

With the smile he was given he found himself unable to refuse. "Alright but only once."

"Of course" Chizuru watched him as he started and noticed that the error lies in the way he molds it. Reaching for his hand, she guided him on the proper way to do it.

Kazama almost stopped what he was doing the moment her hand touched his, guiding them to not put too much pressure to keep the rice from falling apart. This close he can smell her subtle sweet scent. Her hands were small but warm. Her eyes were focused and they gleamed.

"See!" Chizuru beamed moving away from him. "You did it"

Kazama placed the rice ball down with a smile. "I did"

"Just a little â€¦." She wasn't able to finish her sentence. His lips stopped hers from moving. She felt his tongue trying to gain access to her mouth. This was when panic surged and she pushed him from her and moved back. "Kazamaâ€¦sama" she muttered not knowing whether to slap the guy or run away.

Kazama felt rejected. For a woman to not accept his kiss, that was a first. It annoyed him but it made him want to have her more. "Finish these and bring them to the main room. The guest would be here soon" he returned to his formal self to cover his emotions.

"Yes, Kazama-sama" she ducked her head. When he was no longer around she placed a finger on her lips. How could she have allowed that to happen? She felt like an infidel for allowing another man to kiss her now that she was supposed to belong to only one man. \_"Hijikataâ€|"\_" she called for him in her head.

## 16. A Bowl of Jealousy and Longing

### \*\*A Bowl of Jealousy and Longing\*\*

After the incident in the kitchen, Chizuru made sure to keep the formal distance between her and Kazama. She would make excuses to not accompany the man and make their conversations brief. She was sure he noticed this and this didn't please him. That is surely the reason why she was summoned to his quarters after dinner. Before heading to his room she made sure that she was prepared to repel any attempts of his to take advantage of her. Men took advantage of her many times before but she wouldn't allow that to happen now.

Upon announcing her arrival, she was asked to enter and take a seat. Closing the door behind her, she sat near it and ducked her head.

Kazama walked closer to where she was and sat in front of her. He can see how tensed she was and he disliked that. It makes the glimmer in her eyes disappear.

"Chizuru, I'm aware that because of the incident in the kitchen last week you're putting extra effort to avoid me." He crossed his arms. "Raise your head and look at me" he commanded in a low soothing voice.

Chizuru raised her head. Kazama was looking intently at her that it made the hairs on her nape stand. "Kazama-sama. I'm sorry but I couldn't reciprocate any affectionsâ€|" "

"Don't say it like you already know what would happen in the future. If that man loves you then why isn't he right next to you?" Kazama watched as worry clouded her eyes.

"He has his reasons. I may be here and he might be out there doing what he has to do but our hearts are boundâ€|" again she was interrupted. This time by his laughter.

"You're really a romantic. What makes you think that he stays loyal to you? For all you know he might be in another woman's arms at the moment, making her moan his name" he saw the subtle blush on her cheeks.

"Please don't speak about a person you don't know that way" Chizuru ducked her head, still in control of her emotions.

Kazama moved closer to her and lifted her head, holding her chin with a thumb and a finger. "Fine. But I didn't call you here to mock your

love. You're here because you should know how much I hate it when you make up excuses to avoid me. I hope you aren't forgetting your place in this household."

"Of course I know that I am only your servant" she paused. "If Kazama-sama feels like he is in need of company I would comply with his request but I wouldn't participate in any of my master's advancements"

Kazama removed his fingers from her face and pushed the stray strands of her hair behind her ear, making her almost jump back. "I see. So your resolve is strong." He chuckled then stood up. "I could settle with just your company then and would try to behave myself" he turned from her. "You're dismissed"

"Thank you, Kazama-sama" she ducked her head before leaving the room.

Kazama walked towards his window. From the second floor he could see other houses around the mansion but what he liked most was that he felt a bit closer to sky there. A bitter smile formed on his lips, unable to accept that he was rejected by his servant. She's got a point. There are other women out there for him to try and seduce. The thing though is he isn't pursuing Chizuru only because of her beauty but because of the intrigue that surrounds her character. He trusted her yet he doesn't. He can feel that there is something more to her, a secret hidden beneath her warm smile and hopeful eyes.

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Chizuru was relieved that Kazama was satisfied with small conversations with her, with those small conversations though she learns more about the man. He is interesting, a man who many woman would dream to have. She feels bad for him for feeling all alone too. He was wealthy but it was obvious that a part of him was empty. Every time he'd give her that genuine smile as they talk, she can't help but feel herself get a bit attracted to him. That made her feel guilty and many times have she scolded herself about it already.

She stopped what she was doing and remembered that the original helpers from the household would be returning soon. That only means that she'd be returning to the headquarters soon and she can see Hijikata again. In her one and half month assignment they only saw each other once. She dried the last bowl with a sigh. Upon placing it down she placed a hand over her heart.

"So longing can be this painful__â€¦|" she thought with a frown. She wanted to be wherever he was right now.

"Chizuru" Rika called with a couple of knocks on the wooden wall, snapping her out of her thoughts. "I need some radish and potatoes for dinner. I thought we still have them. Please go and get some for me. You know where we buy our vegetables right?"

Chizuru removed her apron and turned to Rika. "Of course" she walked towards her and was handed a pouch with some money.

"Thanks" the woman disappeared as quickly as she appeared.

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With a basket in hand, Chizuru walked down the hallway leading to the front doors with a smile. The weather was really nice and the afternoon sky was neither gloomy nor gay, it was perfect for a nice afternoon walk. The front door was already in sight when she bumped into Kazama who just walked out of from the hallway to her left.

"I'm sorryâ€|I wasn't paying attention" Chizuru ducked her head and picked up her basket which fell from her grip.

Kazama crossed his arms casually. "You're going out?"

She nodded. "Yes. I have to go buy some vegetables for dinner tonight"

Kazama frowned. "I don't like to eat anything with vegetables tonight"

"Then what would you like us to prepare Kazama-sama?"

"I want something with beef" he paused "Actually I want some beef bowl tonight"

"That won't be a proâ€|"

"There's a small restaurant at the heart of the market. Their beef bowl is one of the best I have ever tasted" he interjected. "Let's have dinner there"

"Eh?" she wasn't sure if he heard him right.

"It's my treat" he gave her a small smile.

"Wait but Rika-san expects me to buyâ€|"

"Tch. Whose word has more weight around this house? Hers or mine?" he interrupted, annoyed that she always seem to forget that he was the master of the house.

"Yours, Kazama-sama" she looked away from him.

"Wait for me here. I'd go get my wallet" he walked away from her and disappeared down the hall.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Girls would cover their faces with fans and giggle or blush as they lay eyes on the young master. Something about him made him stand out from the crowd. It was not only his fine clothes which he carries around well, not his handsome face or his pale hair but it was probably the aura he exudes, making the people around him look and feel less than the man in so many ways.

Chizuru kept a one man space between them as they walked side by side but he would always try and remove that space between them. At first not a word was exchanged between them but Kazama started talking about the nearing spring. The topic was random and the words

exchanged weren't much but it eased her tension of being with him. His voice was deep but it was the kind you'd want to keep hearing. She noticed how he'd observe her from the side of her eyes and smile every time she does.

She didn't notice it but she's let her guard down again. The space that divided them disappeared and their knuckles brush against each other every now and then. At one time they both ended up laughing about his failed attempt on a joke and when their eyes met, her heart skipped. It was wrong but her stupid heart was disobeying her head.

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Hijikata was on his way back to the headquarters after checking on his men who are on guard duty. He doesn't have anything else to do that evening and so there was no need for him to hurry back. Strolling around leisurely wasn't that bad, especially when there aren't that much people on the streets, particularly the market area which is the most direct route to the headquarters. Looking around he remembered that Yamazaki was on another assignment at the moment and so was Shimada. He sighed and thought that he should have joined Shinpachi, Saitou and Okita who were eating out for dinner.

Suddenly he snapped out of his thoughts and stopped on his tracks. Narrowing his eyes, he spotted the woman who he longed to see so badly. The sight didn't make him feel happy though. It infuriated him on so many levels that he was surprise that he didn't rushed to the man walking closely to his lover and beat the living hell out of him.

With furrowed brows and a deep scowl on his face, he stepped aside and stood in between two stalls and watched as the two walked towards his direction. He had faith in her and he shouldn't let his emotions drive his actions. There must be a good explanation for this. He recognized the man as the master of the mansion where Chizuru was working at and remembered that Saitou thinks that the man has interest with his woman.

The man would casually move closer to Chizuru and he would look at her in way a man would when they desire a woman. It made him curse in his head. The way she smiled and glance at the man as they spoke made the strings of his temperance pop one after the other. Wasn't he clear when he told her that he didn't want other men flirting with her? A growl escapes his lips. They were nearing him and he wasn't sure if he can stop himself from making a scene. On the other side of his sight he caught a glimpse of the three captains who agreed to eat out for dinner. The situation was getting worse by the moment.

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Chizuru almost froze to death as she spotted her lover who she yearned to see for weeks now. She froze though not because of the excitement of seeing but because of the fear she suddenly felt. She knew that look on his face and she knew that he was irked. Only one thing could possibly elicit that reaction from him at this point. She was sure that he has spotted her and Kazama already.

"Hey. Is something wrong? You look like you need to go use the

bathroom." Kazama turned to her.

Chizuru almost jumped back. She can feel beads of sweat roll down her forehead to her chin. "Ahâ€¦ noâ€¦" she laughed awkwardly. "I was just reminded of something but it's nothing you should worry about"

"We were talking about the worst _dango _I have tasted when I was in Edo. What's bothering about that?" he stopped walking.

Chizuru can feel Hijikata's stare burn on her skin. She didn't even want to look at his direction because she might faint with the pressure. "Ah wellâ€¦." She has to make something up. Fast. "My momâ€¦.my momâ€¦used toâ€¦she used to make the worst _dango_â€¦" she cleared her throat. "No one eats the _dango_ she makes"

"But it isn't hard to make those. How can she be bad at it?" Kazama crossed his arms.

"Forgive me for reminding you butâ€¦ you had a hard time making rice balls" Chizuru at this point noticed that three familiar faces appeared and they approached Hijikata. The situation was getting worse.

"You don't have to remind me" Kazama started to walk again.

Chizuru followed and saw that Hijikata was being pushed by Okita towards a shop across the street. Hijikata wasn't looking at her but her eyes met with Saitou. She knew that they were aware of her presence.

"We're here." Kazama stopped in the same shop where the group just entered moments ago.

Chizuru felt shivers down her spine. There must be a way out of this. "Uhhmmâ€¦ Kazama-sama"

"Hmn?" he tilted his head towards her.

"Don't you think it would be nice to eat some ramen instead of beef bowl" she beamed at him to cover up her ulterior motive.

"Why the sudden change of mind? You agreed with beef bowl haven't you?"

"I didâ€¦ I was just suggesting" Chizuru scratched the side of her neck.

"They also serve ramen here, though it's not their specialty but it's decent." Kazama started to walk towards the restaurant's entrance. He looked back at Chizuru who didn't move in her place. The smile on her face was definitely fake. Something was wrong. "Aren't you coming?"

Chizuru rushed to Kazama's side. Actually she hurried because if she didn't her legs wouldn't move at all. "I'm sorry"

Chizuru entered the restaurant after Kazama. She can feel eyes on her back but she tried her best to ignore it. There was a lump on her throat and her hands were sweaty. Why did she ever agree to eat out

with Kazama? It wasn't something that a servant and her master would do. The owner of the place knows Kazama and guided them to a space just a table away to the left of the men from the Shinsengumi. The owner's and the other customer's comments about Kazama and her making a good couple didn't help her case. She was sure she just saw Hijikata close his eyes in contempt as he tried to calm himself.

Chizuru sat across Kazama who ordered for the two of them. Her mind went haywire and her heart was pricked by tiny needles. She didn't want to make her lover feel the way he does at the moment. If she could she would jump to his arms and beg for forgiveness but seeing that he was trying to restrain himself from any outburst of emotion, she also held her feelings back. Despite the situation her mission was not to be jeopardized.

In a short while that Kazama turned away, her eyes met those of her lovers. He was obviously displeased but she can see the longing in them. How she hoped dinner would end quickly.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Kazama knew from the moment they went in the restaurant that the men from the Shinsengumi were present. He saw how their eyes followed her companion. He assumed that they probably didn't recognize her for she was dressed as a woman and she was a beautiful one in that matter. That might explain Chizuru's uneasiness, so he allowed the strange change in her mood slide.

Not a word was spoken between him and the woman across him whose eyes examined the painting on the wall two tables behind him. She didn't seem to notice that he was staring at her, for if she did she would surely shy away. Finally the food arrived. Two bowls of steaming rice and beef.

Snapping his chopsticks apart he smirked at Chizuru. "Since we're eating out tonight you should be glad that you won't have to serve me in my room tonight"

He wasn't sure if it's because she placed a steaming hot piece of beef in her mouth but he saw the color from her face drain as she dropped her chopsticks and drank the cup of water next to her dry. Following that there was a crushing sound from the men's table, a cup broke.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

"Oopsâ€¦I didn't see that one. Sorry" Shinpachi grinned at the waitress who cleaned up the mess.

"Oi, are you alright?" Souji clapped his chopsticks which were pointed at Hijikata who was actually the one who broke the cup.

"Of course I am" he scowled. "Why would I not be?"

"Your brows say otherwise" Souji leaned back on his chair. He glanced at Chizuru and the man with her on the other table. It's been a while since he last seen her and he was glad that she looks just fine.

"He's born with that look. Don't question it" Shinpachi chuckled.

"Yeah I guess I was born with it" Hijikata focused on his food which was supposed to taste really good but it was bland to him. _Serve him in his room._ Those words bothered him. He can't believe that she would be working that close to that man. His blood started boiling again but he tried counting from one to ten, like Kondo does when he's on the brink of snapping, to clear his mind. With a sigh he continued eating his food and avoided glancing over at the other table.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Indigestion. It was the after effect of the dinner she had. She tossed and turned in her futon that night. Her mind was filled with worries. She didn't want him to get angry at her. She didn't want to lose any bit of his love for her. She didn't want him to think that she was being unfaithful to him, for she only belonged to him. They say absence makes the heart grow fonder but in her case it was going to drive her mad.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Note:<strong>\_Hey guys!\_

\_So there aren't any Oni involvement in here. No ochimizu as well. Chizuru is just a normal woman. Remember chapter 4, vengeance?There was a sadistic customer, she didn't healed causing Hijikata to see the marks on her body. Thanks for asking by the way:3 I forgot to point that out hihhi\_

\_I really hope to finish editing the next chapter so I can update again next week :3\_

\_P.S.- I started another Hakuouki fic. It's a SaitouxChizuru fic, an AU. Shameless ad but check it out if you feel like it hahaha\_

## 17. Wistfully Nostalgic

**\*\*Wistfully Nostalgic\*\***

Chizuru entered Kazama's room with her head kept low and started setting the food on his small table. Just as she was about to finish setting up his meal, he sneezed, sniffed then grunted. She looked up to him and watched as he irritably placed down his pipe on the small dish by the window. He looked pallid and tired. She finished with her work, stood up and started excusing herself when he spoke.

"I'm not feeling really well today. Do you know an effective remedy for a cold?" he inquired as he sat in front of his small table to start eating.

"I can go and get some medâ€¦"

"I don't want to take bitter medicine. That would only make me worse" he interrupted.

"How about some gi  " she paused. She was about to suggest that ginger tea was good for colds but then she remembered the time when it was Hijikata who had colds. "Hhhmm... I'm not sure but I would go ask Jyushiro-san for a quick remedy" with that she ducked her head and left the room.

The events from last night still haven't left her mind. The pained longing look in her lover's eyes and the way he bitterly turned away from her as if to swallow the emotions that were eating him up plagued her dreams. The ginger tea which she was just about to recommend a while back again reminded her of him. She then found her mind wandering aimlessly to a time when the headquarters was just moved and Hijikata caught a cold.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

_"_Uhm  Are you still awake?" she said in almost a whisper from a small gap she made in his door. She watched as his eyes widened and he got out of bed. _

_"_What are you doing here?" he opened the door and urged her in. "What's that?" he looked down the tray with a cup of tea and a bowl with a small cloth in it. _

She looked down and clasped her hands in front of her as she sat next to his futon. "I knew that you weren't feeling well since yesterday and you looked really worn lately. So I made you some ginger tea. It's good for colds" she bashfully explained.

He returned to his futon and held took the cup of tea from the tray. He smiled upon looking down at it. "Thank you" he took a sip. "I never really caught colds before."

_"_I don't think that you've been getting enough sleep. That could cause you to catch colds too you know" _

_"_I'm afraid that having tons of things to worry over isn't helping me get some sleep" he sighed. "This tea is really good" _

She smiled. "I'm glad that you like it"

_"_Anyway, what's that bowl for?"_

_"_Oh this" she turned to the bowl with the small cloth. Slowly tapping her index fingers with each other she replied, "I brought it to be prepared, just in case you have a fever"_

_"_I'm feeling some chills but I don't think I have a fever" he placed a hand on his forehead. _

_"_May I?" she extended her hand to his forehead and frowned. "You're burning up."_

He saw the worry in her eyes then removed her hand from his forehead. "I'm fine. Sleep would cure that"

_"_Hijikata  " she muttered. "but you said you couldn't sleep"

_

_"_The tea soothed me." He placed the almost empty cup of tea down.

"You can leave now. I'll be just fine" _

_"__butâ€|" she wanted to insist on taking care of him but he doesn't seem to like to be taken care of. _

_He saw that she was disappointed to be dismissed like that. He turned away from her then lay down his futon. "Alright. Do what you want" _

_"__Ahâ€|"Alright" she began squeezing the lukewarm water out the cloth from the bowl then wiped his forehead with it. She can see that his cheeks were dusted by shades of pink. She muffled a small laughter upon seeing his embarrassment. _

_"__What?" he turned his head away from her. _

_"__Nothing" she pursed her lips and continued with what she was doing. From his forehead she glided the towel down his neck then to his shoulder and expose chest. Silence dominated the room. The dripping sounds of water as she squeeze it out from the cloth was the only ice breaker they had. _

_Upon finishing wiping his arms with the cloth, she dipped the cloth in the water, squeezed it and placed the folded cloth on his forehead. His eyes were closed and just like always he looked so vulnerable when he was asleep. She took the chance and watched him as he slept with a smile. To her surprise, his hand crept to hers and held it. _

_He opened his eyes and smiled. "Thank you for taking care of me" _

_"__It's nothing. I'd take care of you whenever I have to" she blushed deeply as her eyes locked on his. _

_"__Promise you'll make me that tea whenever I get sick" he closed his eyes lightly. _

_She nodded. "I promise. I'll make that tea only for you" _

_He pulled her to him. With a small squeal, she landed horizontally on top of him. "Stay here" _

_"__Huh? Butâ€|" as much as she wanted to she might not get up early enough to return to her room. _

_He sighed. "I guess it's better if you go back to your room. I'm sorry. I forgot I have a cold. You might catch it too" he released her hand. _

_She sat up and looked at him. She couldn't even begin to comprehend how she could turn him down. "I'll stay" _

_He opened an eye and smiled. "Good" _

_She lay by his side. Hesitantly she rested a hand over his torso. Upon noticing her hesitation he pulled her arm down to him and kept it there. Her cheeks felt really hot. They have done more than just lying next to each other but when he gets all soft like this, probably because of the fever, she can't help but feel embarrassed

still. Upon hearing soft snores escape his lips, she shut her eyes and joined him in slumber._

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Hijikata sensed Yamazaki's presence from outside his room. He opened his eyes and uncrossed his arms. Clearing his throat, he called him in.

"Hijikata-san" he doctored his head upon kneeling across the man who was obviously not in a good mood. "The house maids should be returning from Osaka by tomorrow morning. We can get Shimada to get Yukimura back a couple of days after that"

"\_Couple of days?!" \_he thought as his brows furrowed in obvious disapproval but he knew that taking her out of there right away would make things suspicious. "I see" he simply replied.

Yamazaki glanced at the man and knew right away that he didn't like the idea of allowing her to stay around the mansion for a bit longer. "Saitou-san would be back from the mission you gave him in a week. Maybe we can make him slip into the mansion as a gardener again"

"I don't think that would be necessary though. We have the list of the people who that guy is working with. We have all we need"

"Also, on the way here Kondo-san asked me to tell you that he needs to talk to you about something important"

"I should go and see him now then" he exhaled exhaustedly as he got up. Before leaving the room he glanced at Yamazaki. "Thank you"

Yamazaki ducked his head. "Not a problem"

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Chizuru stared at the lavender _kimono_ in front of her. A small smile formed on her lips as she assessed the elegance and beauty of the clothing presented to her. Rubbing her thumb on the collar of the cloth, she quickly concluded that it was made from a high quality cloth and it must have been really expensive. Glancing at the man in front of her, who was sick earlier that day, the smile on her face faded. She ducked her head and pushed the box containing the _kimono_ back to the man.

"I'm sorry but I couldn't accept this" she stated humbly.

Kazama chuckled. "What would you wear then?"

"Eh?" she looked up the man with a confused expression. "I've got my own clothes"

"I know" he paused and snapped his fingers. "Of course, I haven't informed you yet"

Tilting her head to the side she inquired, "Informed me about what Kazama-sama?"

"There would be a party tomorrow at a lord's mansion and yours truly

is invited" he crossed his arms. "I wouldn't like to go alone in such an event. I would at least want to be seen with something beautiful" she opened her mouth to speak but he beat her to it. "Don't tell me to go find someone else. I don't want someone who would cling to me like a leech throughout the night and continuously throw themselves at me. It would be annoying, especially when half of the reason I'd be there is for business"

"But I'm merely your house maid" she argued.

"And? None of them knows that" he smirked.

"I'm sorry. I can't accompany you" she ducked her head again.

Kazama groaned and moved towards her. "I guess it's time I remind you that I am the master of this house and there is no way for you to disobey me if I insist that you do something for me" he lifted her chin with his fingers. He felt her shudder slightly with his touch. She was about to move away but he kept her still by holding both her shoulders firmly with his hands.

"Kazama-sama" she whimpered softly as she turned her face away from him. The way he tightly gripped her shoulders reminded her of the rough costumers who'd force themselves to her back in the brothel.

"Chizuru" he turned her face to him. "Something's been bothering you today, mind telling me about it"

"I'm not bothered with anything" she kept her eyes shut, afraid that when she opens them she's be welcomed by a nightmare.

"Really?" he hissed pulling her closer. "Open your eyes." He commanded as he regarded the paleness of her face.

She complied slowly and her orbs met with his. "Please let me go" she muttered, her voice trembling. Watching him look at her with apparent lust made her heart pound in fear. As he inched his face closer to her neck, she felt the urge to call for Hijikata but bit her lip as she reminded herself that doing so would spill her secret.

"There's a lot of things I'm curious about, Chizuru" he said in almost as whisper as his lips brushed on her neck. "You seem to have a simple existence but then there is a cloud of mystery and secrets following you around. I'm not sure but I feel it"

"Let me go" she started breathing a bit faster in panic.

He felt her resistance and with the way she was trembling, he felt afraid that he'd break her if he continued. Losing his grip of her, he got up. "I'm disappointed."

She got up and wrapped her arms around her. "Kazama-sama"

"Looks like I've got no other effect on you other than fear but that would be just fine" he chuckled and pushed the box with the kimono in it to her with his foot. "Take that. You'll be coming with me tomorrow. That might be your last task anyway since the other maids are coming back from Osaka tomorrow too."

This time she accepted the kimono politely with a bow. She tried to push away the fear and conducted herself like normal. Her fingers and lips were still shivering though.

"I picked that out myself. I'm sure it would suit you"

"I never had such a beautiful dress before. Thank you" she still tried to be polite despite what happened.

"Of course, the only way for you to have money to buy that quality of clothing is by selling yourself" he replied bitterly. He just wanted to insult her to get back at her making him feel humiliated by declining his advances.

Chizuru pursed her lips. "I may not have money but I'd never do such thing. I'd rather wear rags"

"Ask Rika to help you fix yourself tomorrow. You're dismissed" he picked up his pipe and lighted it.

Without saying a word, Chizuru picked up the box and left the room as quickly as she can. When she reached the far end of the hallway she started crying. The pain she was feeling in her chest wasn't mainly caused by Kazama but was mostly from the awful memories she had from her past. Wiping her tears away with her sleeves, she ran back to her room.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Hijikata stood next to Kondo who smiled at him and patted his shoulder.

"Toshi. Thank you for accepting the request. You know that the clan has been helping us a lot and the man really trusted you." Kondo beamed.

Hijikata held back a sigh. "I just hope that this daughter of his isn't a pain. You know that I don't have that much patience"

Kondo laughed. "She's a grown woman and I heard that she's quite a beauty. I really would've asked someone else to accompany her but her father requested that you do it personally"

"I understand a good job with this might just gain us some extra pay" looking ahead he can make out a carriage pulled by two horses. "She's here"

"She'd be staying at an inn tonight but I'd really appreciate it if you take her there later." Kondo added.

"Fine. Why is she going to a party which is obviously going to be a political one anyway?" he scowled.

"She was travelling from one town into the other and it just so happens that she was going to Kyoto. Her father is in Hokkaido right now and the party is quite an important one. Coming from a huge clan they should at least have a representative and she volunteered. Besides I heard that she'd be handing some of their clan's allies letters for a proposition by her father for a planned meeting"

Hijikata was about to reply but the carriage stopped. As it did, the door opened and two handmaids stepped down. The two assisted a woman out of the carriage. She looked up at them and smiled, her head tilting a bit to the side as she did. The way she dressed and the accessories on her hair declare her social status. She was beautiful and had a very nice figure. She was surely in her late twenties but there was something youthful about her smile that it would probably deceive any man of her real age.

She opened her fan, covered the lower half of her face and ducked her head gracefully to the men in front of her. "Pleased to meet you. I'm Kazue"

Both men bowed. Kondo politely smiled at the woman. "I'm the commander of the Shinsengumi, Kondo Isami and this is my vice commander, Hijikata Toshizou, he'd be accompanying you to the party tomorrow as your bodyguard"

"My, my. They haven't told me that the group is led by such fine looking men" she giggled behind her fan and eyed Hijikata from head to toe. She felt disappointed though that she failed to illicit any reaction from the man.

Kondo scratched the back of his head and laughed awkwardly with the compliment. "And we didn't knew that we'd be graced by such beauty tonight" he laughed and was joined by the woman. "Would you like to have some tea first?" he offered.

"Of course. My father wishes to pass on some message to you as well" she followed the men to the headquarters, behind her were her handmaids.

Hijikata admits that the woman was indeed beautiful and sexy, also a bit forward too given the way she leered at him the instant their eyes met. Glancing back at the woman who followed them, his eyes met hers again. She giggled behind her fan and he just turned away, knowing on instant that the woman probably is someone who isn't afraid to play with fire.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Hijikata found himself following Kazue and her handmaids to their room on the second floor of the grandiose inn. The woman has been casting him meaningful glances but he just dismissed them. Upon entering the room, the woman excused herself for a while and left with her maids. Upon her return she was already wearing a white robe which was supposed to be her night clothes. The thin clothing accentuated her figure and the way that her hair was loosely placed in a bun added to her appeal. It wasn't only her appearance but also the way she conducted herself, made Hijikata swallow hard. She sat on the floor across him and the maids excused themselves to go and fetch them some tea.

"It wouldn't hurt for you to try and smile, would it?" she closed her fan and placed it beside her.

He's been in a bad mood the whole day and he wasn't up for some idle chit-chat. "Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"There are things you can do for me, of course" she giggled. "I'd just like to know more about the man who's going to be my escort for tomorrow"

"I would only be your bodyguard so familiarity wouldn't be necessary" he glanced at the door which opened. A servant placed a cup of tea in front of him and the woman then left right away.

"Are you always this uptight?" she bent down to pick her cup and on the process she managed to give him a view of her mounds.

He kept his eyes on her face after stealing a glance at her womanly features. "Forgive me but I'm not the jolliest person to be with"

"That's just fine. I like men who are serious" she sipped her tea and placed it aside. "So my father told me that I'm going to be with a respectable, disciplined man and I can see that but he didn't mentioned that you'd look good too. I guess that's a bonus"

"Probably" he lifted the cup to his lips and drank a bit then placed it down. "I believe that it's time for me to leave so that you can rest." He was about to stand up but the woman raised a hand, got up and went next to him. His eyes followed the woman and watched as she pulled her hair loose as she leaned to him.

She giggled. "I'm not exactly the modest type am I?" she said as she noted the surprise in his eyes.

"I can see that" he can feel himself tense as the woman touched him. All the passion that was pent up in him tempted to burst from its hold. He can feel the woman's breasts press against his arm and it made him swallow again.

"Well I know my way around men and after getting married and dumped just because of my failure to provide him with a child, I guess you lose all sense of modesty and coyness." She narrated with a bitter smile as her hand reached for his chest. "I think it's love at first sight but I no longer believe in that so it must be lust."

Hijikata cleared his throat and removed the woman from him. "I'm sorry but I should get going" He wasn't able to stand up though since the woman removed her robes and exposed all of her to him.

"Still planning to go?" she leaned closer to the dazed man and playfully caressed his cheek then his arm. "Don't worry no one will know" she let her other hand stroke his thigh before gently rubbing the area between his legs. She smiled as she heard him groan. She covered his lips with hers and didn't expect the hesitant man to return her kisses avidly. She can feel his hunger. The heat of his palms as they started hovering over her body made her crave for him more. She wanted nothing less than to be burned by his lust.

He was taken aback by how fast the woman was that he fell into her lustful trap before he can even think straight. Surely it was hard for a man to turn down such an invitation by such a luscious woman. He found her straddling on his lap. She placed his hand on one of her breasts as her other hand slipped his collar from his shoulder. He closed his eyes and tried to contain the ranging urges. He was aware

of how ready he was to take the woman but his loyalty was stronger than temptation. Besides, the image of his lover flashed before him and it hit his conscience hard in the nuts.

"Stop. Enough." He managed to say sternly.

She stopped moving. "Men really are bad liars. You want me to stop but someone down there is saying otherwise" she grinned as her hands felt him teasingly. "I really think that you could satisfy me very well."

Suddenly having to hold back made him feel really annoyed and uncomfortable but he decided to lift her off him and stood up. "See you tomorrow. I'll forget that this ever happened."

"Why do you refuse? Do you have a woman?" Kazue sounded frustrated and in need. "If you do then I guess she isn't doing well enough to satisfy you"

He stopped by the door and turned to the woman. "I do have a woman and she satisfies me well. You can tire yourself all night but you won't please me as much as she does. Excuse me" his voice was icy, so was his glare.

He succeeded in controlling himself back there but he thought that he really needed to do something to calm his nerves. A drop of water fell on his cheek and slowly glided to his jaw. Soon after, rain poured but he didn't stop. The rain cooled him down but he still needs to take care of the intense pent up feelings he had.

That night he was tormented by thoughts of his lover. He could smell her dulcet scent and how it invaded his senses effectively every time. He can hear her moans and the way she'd call his name as he pushes her towards the edge. He remembers the way her cheeks would flush at his advances and how she'd look at him with her enticingly innocent eyes, tempting him in so many ways. He can feel her hands on him as they explore him, surely different from the way that the woman touched him a while back. He can remember the friction of their skin and the sensation of each touch. He could already see himself taking her upon her return. His body needs her. But it was more than just carnal desires though. He misses her so much that he thinks he's going to get sick in longing. He needed her warm smile, her touch, her presence, and heck he even needs her tea which is the best one for him. He tossed in his bed and shut his eyes firmly. In his head she was just right next to him and it made him feel a lot better.

* * *

><p>Note:

_I was so stressed lately that the updates on all my on going fic were stalled. You see, I have intensive french classes, I'm looking for a job (which is so damn frustrating at some point), I'm also preparing for an exam and I always find my self really sleepy. _

>-I hate leaving things half done so updates might be slow from time to time but I'll finish this fic.

Thanks for the reviews,follows and faves :3

18. Whisk me to the Darkness

****Whisk me to the Darkness****

The people invited to the party spread out in the vast lush garden with a huge pond as the center piece. The lanterns lighted the garden and a group of four women played the _samisen_ with dreamy smiles on their faces as they themselves get intoxicated from the heartfelt melody that they create. The buzzing sound of people chattering in small groups interrupted the harmony though and the casual laughter would engulf each note.

Hijikata listened carefully to the men that stood in front of him as they impart their ideas on the current state of the nation. He glanced at the woman beside him who was conducting herself much decently and even diplomatically. On their way to the party, Kazue apologized to him for her actions the night before. She asked him to not say a word about her misconduct to her father. Of course he agreed. The woman told him that she wasn't exactly the best kid in the family but despite that she was still trusted by her father and so she didn't want to disgrace him.

He crossed his arms and absent-mindedly nodded at the man who was talking. It didn't mean though that he agrees with his opinion or otherwise but the man does more ranting than actually discussing essential points to the topic at hand.

Suddenly, the music halted and everyone stopped talking to face the host of the party who stood proudly in front of everyone, with his young wife clinging on his arm. He welcomed everyone and delivered a short speech then invited people to make their way to the main hall for dinner and drinks.

"Shall we?" Kazue looked at her escort with a smile.

Hijikata nodded firmly and walked next to the woman after everyone else. The night seems calm but he has an unexplainable feeling bothering him since they got to the party and it miffed him a bit.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Chizuru glanced from side to side, surprised with the number of maids lined in the entrance to welcome them. The mansion they were in was bigger than Kazama's and it looked luxurious anywhere she looks. The walls of the hall were lined with pieces of art and the place was well lighted. As they walked down the hall she can hear footfalls and voices coming from a distance.

She turned to Kazama who was walking next to her. "It looks like there are plenty of guests here tonight"

"Of course" he glanced at her. "The lord of this house is known for his extravagance and he doesn't hold back on gatherings like this. Expect to see important people tonight"

A question suddenly popped on Chizuru's mind but she decided to keep silent about it. She just wondered why Kazama would go to a party thrown by a man who opposes the people he has been dealing with. She

has always thought that he had his political loyalty but it appears to her that the man is sailing on two rivers at once.

"Hey, you look so serious. What's the matter?" he inquired as they turned the corner.

Clasping her hands in front of her tighter, she gave him a smile and replied, "It's nothing. I'm probably just nervous" it was true though. Her heart was pounding like crazy since they got to the venue and she couldn't point a finger at the reason as to why it was happening.

"Calm down. You're with me and you're pretty. We'll get by the power hogs just fine" he chuckled and stopped in front of two maids who ducked their head and greeted them. The maids then opened the sliding door and lead them inside the main hall.

Chizuru was surprised to see the amount of people inside and the guards who lined on the sides of the room. The guests were just entering the hall from the other door. They were all absorbed with the conversation they were having with one another. She followed Kazama as he headed to greet one of his acquaintances. Her attention then was caught by something else. Her heart skipped a bit and she almost froze.

"Hijikata" she muttered to herself as she slowed her steps and stood still. She was taken aback by the sight of him but what surprised her more other than his presence was the woman who held on his arm as they sat next to each other. The woman was beautiful, graceful and sophisticated. She seems comfortable with him and he seems fine with it. Chizuru felt a pinch of pain on her chest, the moment she saw him smile after the woman whispers something to him.

Their eyes then met as he looked up. He was obviously not expecting to see her. She opened her mouth, wanting to call to him but as the same time Kazama went to her and held her arm.

"You look like you've seen a ghost" he pulled her with him.

"Ah" she couldn't even find the words to reply.

~~~o~~~o~~~o~~~

Hijikata tried to compose himself despite the astounding turn of events. He couldn't be more glad to see her but it looks like she was with the pale haired man again. He held back a groan as he held his cup tighter. He watched as the man guided his lover to the space adjacent to him and noticed on instant how his hand held hers.

"Is something wrong?" Kazue placed a hand over his.

He slowly pulled his hand away and shook his head. "I'm just thinking about something in regards to what the man was telling us a while back"

"I see" she looked at the people who have already settled in a row across them, each with a small low table being filled with bowls of food. "There are quite a number of interesting guests here"

tonight"

"Of course"

"For instance, you see that guy there with the young lady" she pointed to the man a little bit to the right across them. "Kazama Chikage, he sells foreign goods but he's an arms dealer as well. Pretty young to be engaged in such dangerous business eh?"

Hijikata though didn't need the info, he knows that already. "Dangerous indeed" he placed down his cup and crossed his arms. Just the other night he remembered that he was the same guy who he warned Chizuru about before. Questions like _What if they knew each other from the beginning?_ Or _What if he used to be her patron?_ bugged his mind. Yet he scolded himself again for having such thoughts. He knew she would never betray him.

"Do you know the man?" Kazue nudged his side.

"Not really" he glanced at her.

"But he's been looking at you"

Hijikata looked towards Kazama's direction and the man raised the cup, which was filled with _sake _that Chizuru just poured, and gave him a mischievous smile. He kept the stern look and curtly nodded to regard the man. Turning his attention to Chizuru, he can see how uneasy she was. Despite that she looked really beautiful tonight. He just wanted to walk over to her and take her out of the place. It irked him that she had to stay next to Kazama's when she should have been next to him.

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"Looks like you caught someone's eyes" Kazama chuckled as he glanced at Chizuru who was moving as stiff as a wood.

"Ah~|no~| I don't think so" she kept her head low to avoid Hijikata's stare. She also didn't enjoy seeing him in the company of another woman despite knowing that there is probably a good reason for it. Jealousy is a feeling that never really bothered her before but now she knew how destructive that monster was.

"Do you know him then?" Kazama placed down his cup and waited for Chizuru to refill it but she didn't. "Oh, of course. What am I saying? You know him that's sure. You used to live with them"

Chizuru looked up and met Kazama's calculating eyes. Something about the way he looks at her makes her think that he can see through her. "Is something wrong?"

"Yes" he raised his cup to her.

"I'm sorry" quickly she poured him a drink.

The moment the host sat on his place, dinner began. At first the discussions were decent and everyone seems to be friends but as time flew by and the effects of the \_sake \_sank into the men's nerves, diplomacy was forgotten. Arguments got hot and soon the host decided

that everyone should go out and have some fresh air and dessert. Kazama who didn't said much throughout dinner, joined the men who were close family friends of his. Chizuru followed couple of steps behind him. As the people went out the garden she glanced around to catch a glimpse of her lover but he's nowhere to be found. She bit her lip and kept her head low. She was sure that he was nowhere near pleased to see her with another man again.

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The mood of the party started to lighten, probably because of the music or the moderate temperature and the beautiful night sky.

Hijikata, despite being engaged in a conversation, kept watch on Chizuru who stood next to Kazama. Again he couldn't believe how he managed to keep his temper at check. Suddenly, he saw her duck her head to excuse herself from the group and headed inside the mansion. A maid opened the door for her and they exchanged a word before she disappeared.

Glancing at Kazue who was in a deep conversation with one of her father's friends, he ducked his head and excused himself. He went inside the mansion and looked from left to right in the long hallway, hoping to figure out where Chizuru went. Following his instincts he took the hallway to the left. He ran into maids but they just bowed to him and continued on. His heart was beating like crazy and his mind was clouded with the desire to get even just a minute with her. A minute wouldn't suffice but that is better than just having to stare at her from afar.

Finally he spotted her sitting by the stairs, looking lost. The dimness of the stairs which led to the second floor of the mansion concealed the sorrow in her face but it didn't escape him. He wanted to call her but his lips didn't move. His feet though felt as light as the soft evening air that blew from the open window near-by. He reached for her hand, pulled her up and took her with him.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

"Hi~Hijikata" that was all she managed to mutter as she found herself getting dragged by him into an empty room.

She got a brief look at his face that showed no sign of happiness at all. As she tried to keep up behind him, her eyes stuck on his broad back and the raven hair that swayed lightly as he moved hastily. He was holding her so tight that it made her wince. As they entered the room and he shut the door close, they were engulfed by the painfully soothing darkness. For a moment not one of them moved. She could barely make him out but she was sure that he was staring at her.

He pushed her quite roughly to the wall to their left but before her back could even hit the wall she found herself wrapped tightly in his arms.

"Chizuru" Hijikata whispered to her ear longingly.

"I..." she wanted to tell him she was sorry but she stopped as he let her go. She can hear a small growl escape his lips.



"Why? Why do you disobey me? Haven't I reminded you well?"

There was no specifics in his words but she knew what he was referring too. Her heart felt like it was getting crushed slowly by his words. She can hear the jealousy and anger in his hushed voice. "I'm sorry."

"Do you know him even before we met?" he didn't want to bring it up but he had to get answers to clear his mind. "You told me before that you didn't know him. Did you lie?"

Chizuru reached for him. Her hand landed on his chest and she grasp the cloth covering his flesh. "I didn't lie to you" she held back her tears. She remembered that Hijikata saw Kazama before and warned her about letting him flirt with her. Back then he thought that they knew each other but truly she didn't.

"I know that" he said firmly, relieved with the confirmation.

"About the other day I'm sorry." She bit her lip as hot tears rolled down her cheeks.

He placed both hands on her shoulder and pushed her on the wall. He leaned down to her and he found his lips brushing her cheek in their proximity. "Do you like him?" He asked in almost a whisper.

She felt her heart break with the amount of pain in his voice. She shook her head. "No. I do not. I'm only yours" her voice was weak and it shuddered.

"Then why do you let him act like he owns you! Do you know how that makes me feel?" he exclaimed. "He was just holding your hand a while ago and you get flustered by him when he speaks. Who knows what else you let that man do to you"

"Hijikata's blades cut through her upon hearing his words. "Don't you trust me?" she managed to spit the words out. The darkness of the room was the same as the one that clouded her heart at the moment. It was awful.

In response, his lips landed on her cheeks and he got a taste of her salty tears. Gently his lips travelled to hers. An electric wave of overwhelming emotions rushed through his veins and it made his movements more fervent. He can feel her grasping his arms as he went deeper in her. She complied with his every movement knowingly. They parted for air and resumed tenderly. His hands slipped from her shoulder and went around her waist, pulling her closer to him.

When their lips finally parted from each other she rested her head on his chest and placed her arms around him. "I'm really sorry" she muttered with a sob.

"I'm so angry with you but I hate it when you cry" he chuckled and patted her head. "You're making me crazy"

Chizuru rubs her head on his chest, as if to take in his scent and leave hers on him. "I'm sorry" she muttered.

"Stop. I also have to apologize, I doubted you."

"It's alright" she smiled a bit, removing a hand from around his waist to search for his hand.

Upon feeling her fingers run down his arm in search of his hand, he reached for them and held them. "I miss you so much it hurts"

"I missed you too"

"I shouldn't have sent you on this mission on the first place"

"Hijikata" | "

He sighed and pulled away from her but kept his hand in hers. "We should be going back now."

She wiped her tears from her face and hoped that it won't look obvious that she cried. "You're right. I said I'd be using the toilet. Besides, the woman you're with is waiting"

"Oh her. It's alright"

"She's really pretty, isn't she?"

"She is but what if she is." He pulled her to him once more. "She's no match for you" he said and knew that her cheeks were probably red in embarrassment at the moment. He didn't want to let her go but he did. "We should really get going. As much as I wanted to stay with you longer now, we can't. Besides, I don't know if I could manage to hold myself much longer from you"

"Eh?" she felt her cheeks burn upon understanding the implication of his words.

He let go of her hand and went to the door. He listened for any movement outside and found none. "Let's go" he stepped out first and she followed. Before reaching the end of the hall he stopped. "You should go back first."

"I understand" she was about to walk ahead of him but he held her back and made her face him. "Eh" | "is something wrong?"

"Nothing much" placing a hand on her cheek, he wiped away the smudged red tint on the side of her lips with his thumb.

"I" | "thank you" she placed a hand over his.

"See you when you get back" a teasing smile played on his usually straight lips. "I'll be waiting"

Her blush deepens and she nodded her head. Turning the corner, she placed both her hands on her cheeks to put down the fire that built in them. She turned another corner and halfway through, she bumped into someone.

"What took you so long? Got lost?" Kazama stared at her with narrow eyes. He couldn't dismiss the fact that the dark clouds over her head were already gone. She looks like someone who just found enlightenment.

"Yes" she replied on impulse.

"Why didn't you ask for directions the?"

"I did"

"Anyway we shall get going" he took her hand in his.

She pulled her hand away from him. She remembered what she was just reminded about and she didn't want to break his trust in any way again.

Kazama furrowed his brows but let her stubbornness go.

As they walked out the venue they ran into Hijikata who was just heading back. His eyes were on them but it concealed his irritation. He didn't regard Kazama in anyway and just walked past them.

"That man" Kazama glanced at Chizuru.

"Hhmn?" she tried not to met Kazama's gaze, afraid that he might read her mind.

"He's someone I'd like to cross swords with. I'm sure he won't hold back" a double edged smile appeared on his lips as he noted his companion's eyes widen in both surprise and worry.

End  
file.